The Modern Dragon:

Contemporary Representations from Tolkien to Present

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Abstract

'Every century has its dragons.'[1] I intend to examine depiction of dragons from 1937[2] onwards to try to determine how we perceive the dragon in the modern world. To this end I will examine dragons in a variety of contemporary media, from film and television, as well as literature. They will include, but not be limited to: *Game of Thrones*,[3] *Eragon*,[4] *The Hobbit*,[5] *Dragonflight*,[6] *Guards! Guards!*,[7] and *How to Train Your Dragon*.[8]

Framed by adaptation studies, this thesis analyses the way in which contemporary texts re-interpret and re-imagine the dragon. In so doing, it draws on related theories, in particular human-animal studies, the uncanny, the other, and gender studies, in order to understand the enduring fascination with this mythical creature and the way in which modern authors and directors draw on and depart from both Eastern and Western mythological tradition and folklore.

The first section examines the shape of the dragon and how they are depicted, not only in literary text, but also in television, film, and art work. This involves identifying the literary and mythological forebears of these current depictions, as well as what the presentation reveals about contemporary culture. Having identified recent adaptations of the dragon's physical form, I move to a discussion of the nature of the dragon, in particular its intelligence and morality. Throughout this section, I draw on human-animal studies to analyse the dragon's familiarity and otherness.

Turning to the interrelation between dragons and magic, I look at how dragons are presented as magical beings who at times exhibit magical abilities and at times are themselves the source of magic. As in my discussion of the dragon's nature, it is the strangeness of the dragon which is apparent here: it is a creature of fantasy, beyond the realm of the rational, belonging to what J.R.R. Tolkein refers to as 'Of Faërie'.[9] In the fourth chapter, the focus on dragon-slayers and dragon-riders highlights the human impulse to tame and control or destroy this mystical creature. At the same time, I reveal the human belief in their capacity to domesticate the dragon's essential wildness to be delusive. I conclude with an analysis of the gender ambiguity of the dragon and its particular association with women, foregrounding their mutual marginalisation by society.

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[1] Louise W. Lippencott, 'The Unnatural History of Dragons', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, 77. .334, (Winter, 1981) 2-24 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3795303> [accessed 10 February 2014]. p. 23.
[2] J.R.R. Tolkien *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (London: Oxford University, 1936).
[3] George R.R. Martin, *Game of Thrones* (London: Harper Voyager, 1996).
[4] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon* (New York: Random House, 2002).
[5] J R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937).
[6] Anne McCaffrey, *Dragonflight* (New York: Ballantine, 1968).
[7] Terry Pratchett, *Guards! Guards!* (London: Corgi, 1990).
[8] *How to Train Your Dragon*, dir. by Chris Sanders and Dean DuBois (Dreamworks, 2010).
[9] J.R.R. Tolkein, 'On Fairy-Stories', *Tree and Leaf*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 9-73, p. 40.

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A dragon is no idle fancy.[1]

The first time I ever travelled with my family to Wales, my father pointed at the mountains and said: 'Beneath the mountains sleep dragons; they bring the rain and the storms.' From this early experience, dragons have been an on-going presence in my life and have been the source of an enduring fascination for me. When we think of dragons we think of awe-inspiring reptilian creatures, breathing fire, wings outstretched, and in possession of overwhelming power. Who can forget an image like Daenerys Targaryen and her baby dragons rising from the funeral pyre unharmed? What about Lessa, the first person seen taking flight astride a gold dragon on the cover of a novel? Indeed, even Walt Disney is responsible for children across the globe witnessing the menace of Maleficent battling Prince Philip.

My fascination with dragons has been constant since I was a young boy. It can be described as one part cultural, one part interest, and another equal part love. Tolkien wrote about how much he desired dragons, and my own feelings equal those of the Professor. Every aspect of dragons intrigues me and I have so many questions about them: How big are dragons? How powerful are they? How clever is a dragon? Does it think like us or not? What is the connection between dragons and magic? Is the dragon good or bad? Can we apply such morals to dragons? Do dragons have families? Would a dragon be my friend? I love the differences in all of the variations of dragons, from the wish-granting *long* of the East, to the fire-

breathing and kingdom-ravaging destroyers of the West. My own sister jokes that if there is a conflict in a fantasy story, I am more likely to support the dragon, rather than the human. There is something awe-inspiring and endlessly intriguing about these beings that have surrounded and preoccupied me since childhood. So when I began devoting myself to scholarly pursuits, I was disheartened to find that much of the writing about dragons was out-dated, or in some cases, slightly misinformed. Many of my questions could not be answered and I only saw critics answering or bickering over the same old questions: What does the dragon mean to Beowulf?; Is a *long* even a dragon?; How does this parallel [Thor, Saint George, Marduk]?; Is this dragon Satan?; Are dragons solely pagan?; Why do people like or dislike dragons? Most critics were not paying any heed to the new questions that had emerged since Smaug sprang off the pages of *The Hobbit* in 1937 to renew the literary obsession with the fantastic and wondrous creature that is the dragon, questions such as those previously summarised. I resolved to take up the challenge and answer these questions that had plagued me. Lacking any real dragons to track down and question, I buried myself in all of the lore that I could find, yet still did not get the answers I sought. Therefore I needed to uncover the right questions and my quest began to write this thesis, which endeavours to explore all things that are scaly and lay claim to the title of dragon.

It is necessary to clarify from the outset that this thesis will concern itself solely with dragons of land and air, and not their watery kin, the aquatic dragons, who, while being equally numerous within legend and tradition, hold a far less prominent place in the contemporary consciousness (a lack that would be the potential subject of a thesis in its own right). The aquatic dragon is distinctive from its relatives in that it never leaves its environment. While the *lindorm* and

long that will be discussed in Chapter 1 do have similar attributes to the aquatic dragon, neither have water as their exclusive domain.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the dragon as a 'huge serpent or snake, generally non-venomous like a python' and as a 'mythical monster embodying orphidian and crocodilian structure'.[2] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* meanwhile states that the dragon is 'a fabulous winged crocodile, usually represented as of large size, with a serpent's tail.'[3] The dragon has often been defined, but this thesis endeavours to do something more.

Ursula LeGuin claims that: 'No one can explain a dragon.'[4] This thesis takes up that challenge and focuses on explaining the dragon and its multiple contemporary meanings, associations, and representations. Dragons have traditionally been, as Tolkien describes, *Of Faërie*.[5] They are regarded as creatures of the remote wilds, the borders of civilisation and what he terms the Perilous Realm,[6] and are often suggestive of the magical and unpredictable Otherworld. These characteristics remain a constant feature of dragon lore and representation. Despite this rather static position, the details do change. Stories and symbols evolve with time, suiting new trends or beliefs. Occasionally dragons acquire new traits or definitions, which is why they are in need of consistent re-examination. As adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon argues:

> Stories do get retold in different ways in new materials and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation – in their "offspring" or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than just survive, they flourish.[7]

It is the retelling and flourishing of the dragon in fantasy fiction that is the focus of my thesis. In many ways the dragon is incompatible with core aspects of contemporary culture, with its emphasis on the rational and the material and its suspicion of the magical and the supernatural. Yet, on the page and on screen dragons continue to enchant. Why is this? Is it simply that readers and audiences want to escape from reality into the world of fantasy? Hutcheon points to a deeper reason; narratives about and representations of dragons have not only survived but flourished because they convey enduring story-telling tropes to do with power, with the relationship between humans and animals, and humans and the divine, and with the enduring human quest for magic and meaning. What I seek to do is hone in on the morphing of these tropes in contemporary literature and film. How has the dragon changed and what points of connection remain between recent incarnations of dragons and their centuries-long predecessors?

Before turning to dragons of the present, I thus had to familiarise myself with dragons of the past and their lineage. Julie Sanders argues that '[A] myth is never transported wholesale into its new context; it undergoes its own metamorphoses in the process. Myth is continuously evoked, altered and reworked, across cultures, and across generations.'[8] This is certainly true in the mythical legacy of the dragon. Three key locations and cultures hold primacy in relation to the dragon. Jacqueline Simpson writes that: 'Tales, beliefs, and artistic representations concerning dragons can be found in many different lands, both Western and Oriental, and can even be traced in the two earliest recorded mythologies, the Babylonian and the Indian.'[9] The first location of origin is the Middle East and, to a certain extent, India, where stories of conflicts between dragons and gods date back before most civilisations had developed a written tradition. These stories

describe the first dragon-slayers in literature. Second are the deep and lengthy European traditions, particularly those of Scandinavia and the British Isles. These are perhaps the greatest source of narratives regarding the fire dragon and dragon-slayers. The last pivotal locale of folklore and myth is the Far East of Asia. China, in particular, has a long and detailed history with its own creature, the *long*; debates continue as to whether or not this is technically a dragon, but for literary purposes it can be defined as one because, as Fanfan Chen comments: 'Despite the political and academic polemic on the ideology of dragon or *long* heating up, contemporary world fantastic literature seems to undertake a certain 'globalisation' of dragons in the East and West.'[10]

Carl Lofmark and Ernest Ingersoll both argue that much dragon lore has its origins in the Middle East; one of the earliest examples of these dragons is the Babylonian primordial She-dragon Tiamat. This region is perhaps the most likely point of origin, as 'From a mythological and anthropological aspect, the dragon exemplifies the imagery incarnate in East and West.'[11] Hence the Middle East provides an effective area for the diffusion of the stories and imagery. From the Middle East the dragon would have been encountered by Mediterranean cultures such as the Ancient Greeks and Romans, who in turn transported the dragon westwards. 'The dragon as a military standard was brought to Britain by Romans who had encountered the dragon used as a battle flag by the Scythians, Indians, Persians, Parthians and Dacians.'[12] The Romans are particularly responsible for the broad adoption of dragons into Europe due to the dragon banners and kites of their military cohorts.

Britain, on the edge of the Roman Empire and a relatively small territory, did not see the large deployment of legions like Gaul or Germany, so the Britons had a greater exposure to the dragon standards of the Roman Cohort. This lead to the enduring quality of the dragon among the Britons,[13] particularly in the region now the Principality of Wales, which already had a strong tradition of winged serpents. 'Flying dragons are commonest in Welsh legends, where they may have been influenced by a vigorous and long-lasting Welsh belief in the actual existence of winged snakes.'[14] This superimposition of the Roman dragon led to an absorbing of attributes and characteristics from the native populace, while also ensuring the spread of its image. This serves to explain the level of dragon exposure in Britain, which was augmented by later invasions. Among the Germanic tribes, particularly the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Norse, the British dragon adopted a new characteristic. While previous dragons could change shape, have venomous fangs or poisonous breath, the North men gave the dragon another trait, fire. The Anglo-Saxon conquest enabled the fire drake to spread throughout Britain. In conjunction with an already existing tradition of fire-breathing dragons in Slavic mythology, such as the Dragon of Krakow,[15] the northern European model spread across the continent, which potentially led to the fire-breathing aspect of the dragon becoming common-place.

The spread of Christianity, however, took the dragon as a creature of paganism, and associated it with the devil and wickedness, which saw the escalation of dragon-slaying stories. The church drew parallels between the devil and dragons in that both were winged, horned, and used their tales to ensnare people. This propaganda was not without its flaws, however, as Lippencott states:

> Dragons are mentioned frequently in Latin and vernacular Bibles, thanks to mistranslations of one Hebrew term signifying water monsters and another referring to a desert mammal now believed to be a jackal. Both creatures were rolled into one Latin term, Draco, which caused confusion and gave the dragon some contradictory characteristics.[16]

The Church began to depict dragons as creatures that existed on the edge of (Christian) civilisation, representing sin and the unenlightened pagans. Lippencott further states: 'Conquest of a dragon was an important step on the thorny path toward individual sainthood and the creation of a universal Christian society.'[17] Despite this anti-dragon sentiment by the Church, dragons became popular figures of iconography and prestige. As Thomas Honegger states, 'The recognition of the dragon as the most dangerous monster is traditional.'[18] Given this appreciation for the dragon's prowess, it is unsurprising that they were seen as attractive creatures for heraldry, alongside lions, eagles, and griffins.

The dragons of the Occident are relatively easy to trace by following a line of diffusion beginning in Sumeria and Babylonia and moving westwards, encountering different cultures and travelling, as well as interacting with, pre-existing serpent lore. In comparison, it is more difficult to accurately determine the place of origin of the *long*. Within China, *long* are: 'ubiquitous in history, religion, and daily life even though their true nature is beyond knowledge.'[19] This pervasive status makes it hard to trace whether or not the *long* predates the Middle Eastern dragon. Furthermore, evidence exists that 'the dragon image existed as early as 8,000-10,000 years ago.'[20]

According to Chen: 'Before their Christianisation, Occidental dragons were quite similar to their Chinese counterparts.'[21] Instead of creatures of absolute benevolence in the East and malevolence in the West – as is sometimes displayed in regards to dragons by certain Western writers and theorists such as Lauren Berman – Chen argues that 'European dragons are not all stereotypically evil and pejorative, just as Chinese dragons are not all divine and benevolent.'[22] The Oriental dragon, regardless of its nature, was unarguably a symbol of divinity and power, so it is unsurprising that the Chinese dragon then became a symbol of Imperial power, as the emblem of the Emperor. A similar situation also occurred in Britain, where the dragon standard was ascribed to the figure of Uther Pendragon and later various rulers of Wales, drawing on the dragon's curious place in Welsh tradition where dragons are powerful but not wholly wicked or good. Through this tradition of the dragon as a prestigious symbol, it has endured as a sign of nationalism in both the East in China and the West in Wales.

Within the different cultural traditions there are four highly influential texts on the subject of dragons that provide a useful overview of traditional perceptions of the dragon. In ancient Babylonia, one of the first dragon-slayer stories tells of the creation of the world and ascension of Marduk to becoming the king of the gods. This story is possibly the ur-example of the dragon-slayer story, particularly in regard to gods doing battle with cosmic dragons. Marduk and his fellow gods rebel against the great she-dragon and monster progenitor Tiamat and, through his strength at arms, Marduk slays Tiamat and uses her body and blood to create the earth and oceans. While this story is infrequently cited by scholars of dragon-lore, it is of great significance due to its status as potentially the oldest of the Indo-European dragon stories.

The next dragon story of influence moves westward. Sometime between 975-1025 CE the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* gave what is arguably the definitive account of a battle between a man and a dragon, in a form and poem that have continued to inspire and, through Tolkien, influence modern ideas of what dragons are and how they act.

> The aged dragon of darkness
> discovered that glorious hoard unguarded,
> he who sought out barrows, smooth-scaled
> and evil, and flew by night, breathing
> fire; the Geats feared him greatly.[23]

The dragon-slayer who is perhaps the most iconic, however, is Saint George, a hero from approximately 280 CE. A figure with appeal spanning all of Christendom and even into the Islamic world, Saint George is the most well-known dragon-slayer in the world and has been adapted and interpreted numerous times. A few of these interpretations include: Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (circa 1260 CE), paintings by both Edward Burne-Jones (1865) and Gustav Moreau (1889/1890), as well as the 1984 retelling by Margeret Hodge, and a 2004 television movie *George and the Dragon* directed by Tom Reeve. The saint is the epitome of Christianity's demonisation of the dragon and its associations with paganism. Saint George is also one of the few dragon-slayers to be a country's patron saint, as he was adopted as the Saint of England (likely a slight towards their neighbours in Wales).

The last story that I consider to be an influential part of dragon literature is the story of Yu the Great (circa 1045-771 BCE), from China. The shape-shifting

warrior's story is much older than *Beowulf*, but this is not a tale of dragon-slaying. Yu is one of the earliest heroes to definitively be a dragon-rider, not simply a man who a dragon will carry for a single trip, but one who has bonded and acts with a dragon as his constant companion. These four stories are points of reference to the dragon-centric heritage which influences a number of writers in contemporary culture, whether or not they are aware of it. The stories generally affirm the status of dragons as the enemy, great and fierce opponents and humans as the dragon-slayers or in the case of Yu, dragon-rider. They set the defining roles of both human and dragon within the varied narratives.

Over the years, however, the dragon underwent a series of changes. These changes were more drastic than the dragon's initial spread across Europe via cultural diffusion. The dragon became varied in its symbolism and meanings, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards. The dragon reached a peak of stories during the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and then experienced a corresponding influx of scholarship in the nineteenth century. While there has been a revival of these stories in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there has been comparatively little academic attention. Louise Lippencott explains:

> The mixture of form and metaphor evidenced in the nineteenth-century dragons indicates the shifting and broadening of form and meaning that have occurred since belief in dragons – and serious dragon studies – have declined. The weird creatures that grace the covers of science fiction novels or haunt the fantasy adventure games today are even more remote from their medieval and Renaissance forerunners.[24]

The dragons of today have changed and altered beyond the way in which their parent cultures initially regarded them. Dragons now are found in a variety of

places and have, as my previous quote from Chen highlights, been globalised. They are less fixed in their incarnation and interpretation. The contemporary dragon may have characteristics from both East and West, using the best and the worst. Dragons can equally be products of a culture's heritage and the author's imagination. These dragons have grown remote from what is well-known and studied, confirming the need to review dragons in a different light, paying attention to the changes that their representation has undergone in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Dragons are not static figures in human history; they have undergone changes and variations. The dragons called *lindorms* show that they did not always fly; the stories from the Middle East do not have fire-breathing dragons; in pre-Christian texts, dragons were forces of primordial chaos rather than evil. Louise Lippencott even states that 'Every century has its dragons.'[25] Adaptation theory provides a useful overarching frame for understanding how and why these changes have occurred. It is for this reason that Linda Hutcheon's theories of adaptation will be used throughout to analyse the changing and mutating nature of dragons within both screen and literature.

The dragon also cannot solely be examined within cultural cornerstones, as Cohen writes: 'Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural and literary historical) that generate them.'[26] There is a varied wealth of scholarship within a number of fields related to the dragon, either directly or indirectly, many of which I draw upon in this study. Critical discussions relating to dragons frequently intersect with multiple fields. Mythologies around the world have loose analogues to the dragon, be they

lindorms, *naga*, *longs*, wyverns, winged serpents or, to a certain extent, Taniwha. To keep my focus of the popular idea of the dragon, however, I had to limit myself as to which mythologies I could draw upon, settling upon those of Scandinavia, Britain, and China, as these cultures have had the greatest influence upon the depiction of the dragon. Scandinavia and Britain are critical due to their construction of the fire dragon which dominates current depictions, and their extensive array of writing and imagery showcasing the dragon, while China has been the historically dominant, as well as the regionally largest country within the Orient, leading to its depiction of *long* being of the greatest influence. Among the texts relating to mythology that I have found particularly useful are translations of *The Poetic Edda* which provide a basic mythological grounding for the Western tradition; Richard Barber's *Myths and Legends of the British Isles*[27] which contains helpful examples of British dragons; and Martin Palmer and Zhao Xiaomin's *Essential Chinese Mythology*[28] which gives an English translation of the dragons of the East. Additionally, Alice Mill's encyclopaedia *Mythology*[29] and Carol Rose's *Giants, Monsters, and Dragons*[30] provide a more general overview of dragons in mythology. Mills and Rose also provide examples of well-known dragons in specific locations such as Krakow, and open up the study of Classical Mythology in relation to dragons. Within the field of Classical Studies, there are some moderately useful nuggets of information, as the dragon is found lurking in texts relating to alchemy and occasionally as a guardian of treasure.[31]

Medieval studies and folklore studies are central to dragon scholarship. These fields of study focus on the foundation texts that created and perpetuated stories about dragons. In comparison to the relatively small but significant texts regarding mythology, there is a wealth of critical material relating to medieval studies and

folklore. Significantly, the critics who are interested in dragon-lore are different to those whom I had previously encountered in relation to folklore. Rather than the well-known folklore and fairy tale theorists Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar, I draw upon British folklorist Jacqueline Simpson's *Scandinavian Folktales* and *British Dragons* and the work of semiotics scholar Jonathan D. Evans. Whereas Simpson provides specific examples of folklore, Evans' structuralist approach provides a framework within which dragon stories, particularly Northern European stories, may be analysed. Carl Lofmark's *The History of the Red Dragon,* meanwhile, is the most useful critical work from the field of medieval studies with regard to dragons, drawing on the rich cultural tradition of Wales.

Dragons are prominent in art as well as literature and thus I have found art history scholarship useful in my analysis. Art is significant in both an Eastern and Western context due to both having a rich tradition of artwork; the artwork simultaneously influences and is influenced by literature and folklore. To this end, scholarly texts such as Louise Lippencott's article 'The Unnatural History of Dragons' and C. A .S. Williams' *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*[32] are important in helping to understand the image of the dragon. These works look at the colour, shape, and even types of dragons in decoration, as well as the defining specific characteristics of different dragons. 'In fact, before the eighteenth century most people believed that the dragon was a type of serpent appearing in several varieties, similar to the division of dogs into breeds such as terriers, poodles, and spaniels.'[33] The two works assisted my understanding of the diversity of dragons within individual cultures.

Given the different meanings ascribed to dragons within different cultures, anthropology likewise provides valuable tools of analysis. This is particularly apparent in the East/West divide after the advent of Christianity in the West and Buddhism in the East. This material enables an understanding of when and why dragons developed an evil reputation. I also encountered ideas, such as dragons and magic, that had previously had little or no scholarly material on which to draw, so broader theories and different critics were needed. My investigation into the subject of dragons and magic led me to Islwyn Blythin[34] and Rodney Stark,[35] as well as Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax,[36] their works, while insufficient, directed me to one of the key thinkers of modern anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, whose essays on *Magic, Religion and Science*[37] have been influential in shaping my analysis of dragons and magic.

All of these theories have been effective in looking at dragons as actual figures appearing in the text; however, I did encounter a number of texts that use the dragon as a metaphor. Academic fields such as psychology use a dragon as a turn of phrase to illustrate something difficult and dangerous, while dragons are also used to describe Oriental nations in both economics and political studies.[38] This shows evidence of the pervasiveness of the dragon and its integral role as part of Oriental culture, yet does not discuss the dragon as a physical entity so cannot be utilised effectively in this thesis.

The lack of critical analysis regarding dragons and what they mean to themselves, rather than as a metaphor for human behaviour, has forced me to look towards alternative theories with which to examine them. Phillip Armstrong's *Animals in the Fiction of Modernity* allows me to draw upon the relatively recent field of

human-animal studies to analyse dragons as animals. Armstrong notes: '[Scholars of Human-Animal Studies] are interested in attending to not just what animals mean to humans, but to what they mean to themselves; that is, to the ways in which animals might have significances, intentions and effects quite beyond the designs of human beings.'[39] Human-animal studies provide an effective model in examining a dragon's nature and its interactions with humans in fiction. In addition to Armstrong, J. M. Coetzee's fable-styled narrative *The Lives of Animals* provides a key mode of analysis in looking at how we perceive dragons as animals. He states that 'Man is godlike, animals thinglike.'[40] Humans separate themselves from animals with the arrogant assumption that we are made in a deific image and that our sentience marks us as special – which raises the question: as they can be considered both human and animal, what are dragons? The utility of Coetzee's fable is unsurprising; since dragons are creatures of myth and fable, the fable is therefore an effective medium of presenting these ideas that correlate to the dragon.

A dragon is sometimes depicted as being unsettling and alien. To explain some of these characteristics that humans find uncomfortable I make use of Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' which provides a helpful frame for analysis regarding specific abilities and psychological quirks related to dragons as novel and unfamiliar creatures. Freud posits that 'We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny.'[41] Additionally, while human-animal studies focus attention on dragons as animals, they cannot be viewed exclusively in this manner as many depictions of dragons present them as having intelligence comparable or superior to humans, hence theory regarding the 'racial other' such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*[42] becomes necessary, particularly in their interactions and

culture clashes. The dragon is intelligent, in some cases learned and cultured, having its own beliefs and traditions, therefore an encounter between human and dragon would involve the points of difference that theory of the 'racial other' will address. Furthermore, when I discovered it necessary to talk about dragons with regards to gender, I consulted feminist theorists such as Judith Butler to provide a context for gender ambiguity and non-binary depictions of gender.

The gender theorists are not wholly relevant towards gender politics of non-humans or interactions with something so fantastic, but I found an effective intermediary in Ursula K. LeGuin's essays and lectures. This literary criticism assisted in some of the close analysis in texts that still follow early twentieth-century methods. Many of these critics draw upon the scholarship of J. R. R. Tolkien, particularly his acclaimed lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,[43] as well as the essay 'On Fairy-Stories'.[44] The theorists who use this essay to view some recent literature include Sandra Unerman, whose *Dragons in the Twentieth Century*[45] which briefly examines dragons in their transition through modern literature. Thomas Honegger, in his essay 'A good dragon is hard to find: from draconitas to draco,'[46] provides key information regarding dragon storytelling in a pre- and post-Tolkien environment. Lastly, while Melanie A. Rawls' essay *Witches Wives and Dragons*[47] is a necessary starting point for discussing dragons in relation to women and gender, her work also bridges the gap between the Tolkienian scholars and Ursula K. LeGuin.

This thesis examines dragons primarily within the genre of fantasy. This is a crucial genre, since, while dragons have appeared in other texts to a greater or lesser extent, they are a key signifier of fantasy. Unerman writes that '[i]n the

twentieth century, many works of fiction have featured dragons, more so than ever since fantasy fiction became a successful publishing genre in the last thirty years.'[48] Dragons are so common place within fantasy that the appearance of a dragon within a text is enough to put the genre of a text into question, so a dragon can change a setting from science fiction to fantasy by its mere presence, regardless of the setting's other characteristics. This is particularly apparent with *Dragonflight*[49] of the series *Dragonriders of Pern* which, debatably, is equally a work of fantasy and science fiction.

The key time period for this analysis is after 1937, as the publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit* led to the advent of the pervasive fire-breathing, winged, intelligent dragon, which, while occasionally deviated from, remains the archetype of the dragon in modern fantasy. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, as well as other texts from his Middle Earth legendarium, forms the starting point for my primary literary texts. There is obviously a wealth of twentieth and twenty-first century fictional depictions of dragons, including: Shenron of Akira Toriyama's manga series *Dragon Ball*, Kilgharrah from the BBC television series *Merlin*, Maleficent of Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, and the Bunsen-Burner family from Dick King-Smith's *Dragonboy*.[50] Each of the texts discussed in this thesis thus had to have a core reason for inclusion, allowing for a diverse range of sources.

Following chronologically from Middle Earth is Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* series, which provides a distinctive post-Tolkien view of dragons. While the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* has a wide variety of dragons depicted in its number of editions, many books, and various properties such as *The Forgotten Realms*, *Eberron*, and particularly *Dragonlance*, I have decided to use only select

books on this topic. My reasoning is that the dragons depicted elsewhere are all derived from the *Monster Manual*, whose most well-known current incarnation is the *Monster Manual 3.5* by Skip Williams. I will also draw upon the *D&D Draconomicon* which provides some additional lore regarding these particular dragons. The next significant text is Anne MacCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern*, which pioneered the subject of dragon-riding in contemporary literature. Of these three texts, *Pern* and *Dungeons and Dragons* are the most significant in their influence upon the genre. Later texts from the twentieth and twenty-first century will include Tamora Pierce's *Tortall* series, Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which respectively cover children's and adult fiction in relation to dragons. Other texts will include the franchise of Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* and its film adaptation of the same name.

I will be using a mixture of both visual and written texts, as dragons have never solely been creatures of story; the image of the dragon also has a long history as an image. While this visual history was, for many years, limited to art work, I will be using film as it offers a way to view an active dragon whose movements and emotions are better realised than in static pieces. Arguably, artwork has ceased to be the primary medium in which dragons are depicted visually. Film is now the most accessible way for audiences to observe and react to the appearance of a dragon. Hutcheon writes that '[p]sychoanalytic film theorists argue that audiences are more deeply involved consciously and unconsciously when watching a movie because of the processes of identification, projection, and integration.'[51] In addition to the film *How to Train Your Dragon* and its sequel, I will also be making use of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* directed by Chris

Columbus, *Dragonheart* directed by Rob Cohen, *Spirited Away* directed by Hayao Miazaki, and Peter Jackson's second instalment in his adaptation of *The Hobbit*, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*. These visual representations will allow for an analysis of how dragons on film are perceived, what kind of visual effects are used in their creation, and whether there is a predisposition to particular shapes of dragon on-screen.

The intention of this thesis is not to reiterate previous arguments about dragons, such as how *Beowulf* is the dominant text about dragon-slaying or why allusions to Saint George are prevalent within stories. I will rely on the previously mentioned traditional works as fundamental cornerstones, but the primary function of these texts will be to support more contemporary material. This thesis intends to concentrate on new conventions applied to dragons, such as innovative magical abilities and their effects upon humans. It also concerns itself with removing homogeneity and turning attention to increasingly diverse types of dragons, analysing the dragons' personalities and type of existence. As well the thesis will examine ideas such as dragon riding that, while new to literature, have an ancient lineage.

My first chapter will analyse the Shape of the Dragon, scrutinising its appearance and physical attributes. This chapter will also focus predominantly on visual depictions of dragons and will identify the four most common types of the species. This chapter draws on adaptation theory to interpret the evolving appearance of dragons. The second chapter will delve into the psyche of a dragon, examining its nature as well as its cultural position. Nature of the Dragon also concerns itself with the contradictory characteristics of dragons, their savage and

animalistic nature co-existing with its civilised intelligence, and it is here that the emerging field of human animal studies proves most useful.

To fill a gap in the scholarship of dragon-lore, my third chapter adresses the murky subject of magic in relation to dragons. In response to the lack of critical material, I utilise symbology and anthropological theories of magic —in addition to Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy-Stories'— to argue that dragons have an intrinsic link to magic, which in turn affects the world around them. My fourth chapter first details the subject of dragon-slaying, as well as its literary influence. Secondly, as there is a lack of scholarship on dragon riding, in my fourth chapter I will also construct an original paradigm to better understand the recent phenomenon of dragon-riding by drawing on dragon-slaying scholarship theories.

The final chapter will initiate a discussion about dragons and issues of gender. Can such an earthly concept as gender even be applied to creatures of magic? A later section of this chapter will look at the relationship between dragons and women, such as why women are generally better than men at befriending dragons. Lastly, this final chapter will discuss the taboo of inter-species romance between human and dragon.

Throughout, my exploration of the contemporary dragon is underpinned by two core questions that form the basis of my quest: why do dragons continue to fascinate storytellers and audiences, and what leads novelists and directors to create creatures who bear fundamental resemblances to previous traditions but who are also transformed for a new age? The answers are at times expected, but

frequently surprising, for, as LeGuin instructs: 'it is one thing to read about dragons and another to meet them'.[52]

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Chapter 1: The Shape of the Dragon

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> The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence.[1]

When the name 'dragon' is mentioned a set of physical characteristics immediately spring to mind: the capacity to breathe fire, armour-like scales, wings unfurled in flight, reptilian claws and fangs. Above all, perhaps, is an overwhelming sense of the sheer size and weight of a gigantic creature. Cultural tradition has built up this set of ideas about how a dragon should look. My task is to interrogate whether contemporary depictions of the dragon conform to these traditions, or whether authors and directors depart from convention. Do writers for the page and the screen seize the opportunity to put their own stamp on the shape of the dragon or seek to pay homage to those who have gone before? Do audiences enjoy the familiar, or demand relief from monotony?

In answering these questions I draw on adaptation theory, which provides a framework for understanding the dual impulse towards fidelity and change which is a feature of contemporary representations of the dragon. Linda Hutcheon says of the human love of adaptation: 'Part of this pleasure, I want to argue, comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise.'[2] Modern texts offer variations of the dragon, often playing with tradition and the dragon's appearance, such as how many wings it has, the number of legs, and even how reptilian it looks. Yet, despite the ability to

shape the dragon to suit the individual author's creative vision, there seems to be a limit to how far authors and directors are prepared to go in changing the dragon's physical form.

Adaptation theorists are alert to these limitations, seeking to categorise the degree to which adaptations depart from tradition. Focusing primarily on the adaptation of written texts to films, Hutcheon identifies three tiers of adaptation: transposition, commentary, analogy. The first tier, that of transposition, refers to a text with minimal interference, the adaptation designed to keep the original narrative as intact as possible. In contrast, the commentary adaptation deliberately integrates new ideas into the narrative in order to comment on the original, although the relationship between source and adaptation remains strong. Finally, the analogy is an adaptation that essentially becomes a new text that uses the semblance or components of an existing text in order to explore partially or totally new ideas.[3] This tripartite hierarchy of adaptation is the norm in adaptation studies.[4] John Desmond and Peter Hawkes come up with three similar adaptation strategies, the 'concentration strategy', the 'interweaving strategy', and the 'point of departure strategy', while Dudley Andrew follows a comparable tripartite division: borrowing, intersecting, and transforming.[5] Linda Costanzo Cahir's three modes of adaptation — the literal, the traditional, and the radical — are perhaps the most useful for my purpose, emphasising as they do an overt progression away from the source material to a new creative entity.[6]

Of course, in this chapter and throughout my thesis I am not directly exploring the adaptation of textual dragons to the screen, although I do profile both written and visual representations of the dragon. What I am interested in is the way in which

the tropes and narratives that feature dragons have been passed down through the ages to be recycled and transformed in the work of contemporary authors and directors.

The triple structure of adaptation theory is particularly useful in this chapter as I chart the nuanced ways in which contemporary creative artists depict the dragon, at times following a pattern of 'borrowing' that is fairly 'literal' or 'traditional' and at others daring to be more 'radical' and use tradition as a 'point of departure'. While some of the representations of dragons discussed in this chapter do reach what Dudley terms a place of 'transformation', most of the depictions are offspring which bear a marked similarity to their literary and mythic forebears. My analysis is thus suggestive of the deep comfort we take in familiar tropes and ideas. At times we may revel in the daring and different, but the work of the authors and directors discussed here is suggestive that, in terms of shape at least, we want our dragons to be recognisable. As Doru Pop writes about the amalgamation of mythology in contemporary cinema:

> The concept of the familiarity of images, borrowed from perceptual psychology, when used to understand the functioning of contemporary imaginary formations shows that there is direct link between cultural memory and visual recognition. We are attached to those images which are familiar to us, we tend to use these images in order to organize our past, which lead to an amalgamated imaginary built by transferred values of various visual structures.[7]

The four most common varieties of dragon in popular media —the Indo-European True Dragon, the Wyvern, and the Lindworm, as well as the Chinese *Long* — thus

have their origins in a tradition spanning centuries. The depiction of these dragons and what their appearance signifies has certainly been subject to some change over the years. This is unsurprising considering Julie Sanders' comments on the adaptation of myth: 'In turn, the persistently adaptable and malleable myth is given a newly relevant social and cultural geography.'[8] The dragon has to alter to fit new cultural contexts or else become stagnant and forgotten, although some physical traits remain a constant. As Jacqueline Simpson writes of dragons, 'it is the reptilian traits that predominate whether these are based on the crocodile, the lizard, or (most often) the snake. In many cases, the monster is said to be immensely large, far beyond the dimensions of any living reptile.'[9]

Yet these are not set rules. While dragons typically possess a tough hide, reptilian features, and a powerful bite, they have undergone different iterations with a variety of features. Despite the lizard associations, for some variations of dragon, wings and feet are not a requirement. Louise Lippencott notes that: 'Along with the optional wings and feet, other features could be added in various combinations, so that many, but not all, dragons had sharp fangs, three clawed feet, horns on the fore head or nose, or hairy ears.' The mix-and-match nature of these dragon characteristics allows for a degree of variation in contemporary depictions of dragons. There are however, certain characteristics that are almost impossible to remove from dragons, particularly in a modern consciousness. Reptilian countenance and keen vision are all that is truly required of a dragon, the elements of 'tradition' that are 'borrowed' and remain fairly static. Everything else is subject to change; past dragons have been little more than oversized snakes. The only reason why certain characteristics are considered significant and necessary in different adaptations of the dragon is their popularity and this chapter

interrogates why certain innovations capture the popular imagination. As Pop asks about recent cinematic representation of mythology, what kind of 'contemporary (commercial, political, cultural) purposes' does the modernisation of the dragon serve?[10]

In contrast to subsequent chapters, which will focus more heavily upon textual examples, this chapter's dominant focus will be in the visual medium of film and television. As Chris Jenks writes in his introduction to *Visual Culture*, 'the modern world is very much a *seen* phenomenon'.[11] Dragons have been depicted for centuries in paintings and heraldic emblems, but in the age of cinema this visualisation of these mythological creatures has become even more prevalent. In a chapter which focuses on the physical form of the dragon, screen evocations of its size, shape, and colour in contemporary culture are particularly relevant.

A significant trait, and one of the two obligatory traits, is the dragon's keen vision. Carl Lofmark even theorises that the Greek word δρακων (dragon) is derived from δερκιν (to see), a theory corroborated by *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*.[12] A creature known as the greatest predator would need to see incredibly well; this is apparent when, despite the diversity in appearance, all of the featured dragons are keen sighted. Tolkien's Smaug is described as having especially acute vision 'Nothing escapes his eyesight once he sees it.'[13] Vision of the *Long* is also exemplified with the cosmic dragon who is known as the 'Enlightener of Darkness',[14] whose vision is so great that he creates day and night by opening and closing his eyes. Sight is also indicative of the dragon's status as a guardian beast, such as the dragons set to guard the Hesperides Tree and the Golden Fleece in classical myth.

In contrast to keen vision, fire is not one of the dragon's original characteristics; within folklore and myth dragons are more likely to be associated with water and to use venom. Yet now dragons and fire are inseparable. The characteristic potentially emerged from the dragon's associations with lighting and with spitting burning venom, which later, through retellings transformed into fire. Although earlier examples exist, the most famous early fire drake is probably the fire dragon of Beowulf. Within contemporary literature, however, the vast majority of dragons are fire-breathers. Fire is so frequently associated with a dragon that its absence is considered a divergence from the norm, which is why the iconic nature of fire and its various meanings will be a recurring subject within this thesis.

Visually in both live-action and animated film dragons are commonly shown breathing a stream of flame, however, the advent of computer-generated images has now led to some adaptation and innovation with regards to how dragons breathe fire. This is explained in *The Technical Artistry of How To Train Your Dragon*, that 'In most dragon movies, the fires are based on propane gas.'[15] Instead for *How To Train Your Dragon* they chose to depict the fire in a variety of ways, such as exploding gas ignited by sparks, sticky napalm breath, plasma bolts and even molten balls of magma. Meanwhile, Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* portrays Smaug's fire breathing as a process with a glow beginning in his stomach and travelling to his mouth. This changes the way in which dragons are depicted as it allows for greater variation within depictions and suggests that dragons with common traits are more distinct and memorable. Despite common features, the dragons need not be homogeneous. These film

directors have shown that modern depictions of fire breathing can tailor the fire to suit the dragon.

While they are not universal characteristics, legs and wings are significant features on a dragon. As Lippencott states, legs are often considered optional in the depiction of dragons and whether or not dragons possess legs is often a vague concept in their history. 'Some verbal descriptions include them, others not.'[16] This lack of detail meant that a formalisation of Western dragon types only occurred with the advent of medieval heraldry. As Simpson notes on the subject of legs:

> Pictorial representations…whether medieval or more modern, almost always do include them; indeed, legs are an essential item in the heraldic definition of a dragon, the four legged species being true dragons and the two-legged ones wyverns.'[17]

Legs and wings become the identifier of the variety of European dragons, which are quite distinct. While in the past differences between a true dragon and a wyvern were cosmetic, the number of limbs and type of dragon becomes significant when depicted on screen. This is because in film, particularly live-action, there are a number of challenges in depicting the dragon and so there is a predisposition towards the wyvern as opposed to the true dragon. This difficulty is understandable, as Hutcheon explains: 'Transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means change, or in the language of the new media, "reformatting".'[18] As mentioned by Chris Sanders, '[d]ragons are significantly more complex than characters we've done before.'[19]

In using a true dragon's body type a number of mechanical issues emerge in making the dragons realistic. This is one of the obstacles faced in the development of Smaug for Peter Jackson's film *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*. 'One of the things that wasn't satisfying was the fact that his front legs were so far from his head, separated by the vast length of neck.'[20] This leads to a situation where it is easier to base these dragons on animals, so the movement looks more 'realistic'. 'Bats were useful reference for Smaug's movement on all fours.'[21] Altering Smaug from a true dragon to a wyvern helped in an anatomical sense, for the modellers were able to produce a more effective cinematic dragon. 'One thing we discovered when we went from four legs to two was that we didn't actually need as much body. We could reduce it, which helped the overall design.'[22] The importance of design and movement, as well as the desire for a dragon that is realistic in its movement, is the reason for the overwhelming existence of wyvern-shaped dragons in film despite the dominance of the true dragon in fantasy literature.

Colour has been a significant aspect of dragons as early as the medieval dragon tradition. As Lippencott states, '[d]ragons varied not only in shape, but also in size and color. The compiler Topsell listed dragons of gold, red, and blue, along with the more common green and brown ones.'[23] Three of the most well-known of these medieval dragons are the gold dragon standard of Uther Pendragon and the Red and the White Dragons from the prophecy of Emrys (Ambrose) Merlin. The red and gold colours of dragons are generally indicative of the dragon's fiery nature, but the other colours are given less specific meaning. Within contemporary fantasy these colours do occasionally conform to a chromatic hierarchy. Red and gold are the highest colours, followed by brown, green and blue, with white as

often the least important. This particular order is shown in Anne MacCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* series, in which a dragon's colour corresponds to its size and strength. A similar situation also emerges amongst the chromatic dragons of *Dungeons and Dragons 3.5*, where the particular colour of the dragon is an indicator of size, strength, intelligence and magical power.

Within modern film, however, there are different approaches to the portrayal of dragons. Dragons with more vibrant and less natural reptilian colours, such as the golden (or, as shown on screen red-golden) Smaug from Tolkien's *The Hobbit* are generally depicted, in terms of colour, quite faithfully to the source material. These dragons are also the ones who are iconic and have individual names that are recognisable. The distinctive colour reinforces the importance of the dragon. The more reptilian green and brown dragons depicted, such as Draco in Robert Cohen's film *Dragonheart* and the Hungarian Horntail from the film adaptation of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, opt for a greater sense of realism in the dragon's appearance. Colour is also a means to make the dragon appear more generic, less of a unique creature and more a natural part of the world. In the case of the Hungarian Horntail this is particularly obvious, but even with regard to Draco there is less emphasis on his status as a dragon than on being the last of his kind. The very blue Saphira from Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*, appears, like Smaug as a faithful adaptation from the text. Unlike the depictions of blue dragons within *Pern* and *Dungeons and Dragons*, however, Saphira's colouring appears to have little influence upon her size and strength as a dragon. Colours have become less about chromatic superiority or blending into the natural world, and more about expressions of the dragon's magical nature. Additionally, recent adaptations have incorporated more bright and friendly colours, such as

pink, purple and yellow. Elliot, in the 1977 Disney film *Pete's Dragon* has a lime green body with a purple tuft of hair; his appearance would struggle to strike fear or terror into anyone. Dragons like this are aimed towards a young audience and their colours give them an inoffensive quality, a domesticated and child-friendly demeanour. This is partially the influence of the 'draco modernus domesticus'[24] effect mentioned by Thomas Honegger, that in an effort to make creatures like dragons less fearsome and frightening (particularly for children) they are dressed up in bright colours.

True Dragon

The true dragon is commonly the dragon depicted in Britain and Scandinavia, and is always regarded as a representative of strength and power.[25] These are the dragons most likely to challenge deities.[26] Additionally, these dragons are also more likely to be given offerings or sacrifices.[27] Perhaps the most famous true dragon within folklore and legend is the Red Dragon or Y ddraig goch[28] from the prophecy of Emrys Merlin, who saw it battling a white dragon; this vision heralded the defeat of King Vortigern. This iconic Red Dragon is now the national symbol of Wales. This particular dragon may be traced in English heraldry from roughly 1400 CE[29] and is notable for its four legs, reptilian, but not necessarily serpentine, appearance, and a pair of large, bat-like wings upon its back. He is called a true dragon in heraldry, due to having four legs, rather than two like his cousin the wyvern, although in many stories the true dragon and wyvern are interchangeable. These are dragons of the mountains and are usually forces of nature. The dragon Diamondflame from Tamora Pierce's novel *Realms of the Gods*,[30] is another true dragon; he is large and powerful, capable of magic and yet is ancient and wise. Much as tradition states, he has four legs, two wings, is large

and thoroughly reptilian in appearance. He is also considered a rival in power to minor deities. 'A golden crest rose from his broad forehead and swept down to his shoulders, lending him a stern, crowned aspect. His large indigo eyes glittered with intelligence.'[31] Like many true dragons in contemporary written fiction, very little of the traditional attributes are altered in the portrayal of Diamondflame. Variation is more likely to emerge in the other varieties of dragon than the true dragon, which remains relatively constant.

Draco (*Dragonheart*)

Figure 1: Draco

In adaptation terms, Draco, from the film *Dragonheart*, can be considered a homage to the pre-existing depictions and of the true dragon in both literature and dragon-lore. Draco has a powerful tail, is larger than a house and possesses all of the traits that viewers commonly associate with a dragon. During his fight with the dragon-slayer Bowen though, Draco shows all of the capabilities that a true dragon possesses. Despite most of the fight being on the ground, the dragon is clearly winning. He can use his fore claws to pin his would-be slayer to the ground. He is able to send Bowen flying with a single swipe of his tail; furthermore, at best Draco can only be caught in a stalemate when he attempts to bite down onto Bowen, who responds by sticking his sword halfway up the roof of the dragon's mouth. His movement, however, is a bit unreal; his wings will beat, but his body remains still when he is in flight and when walking he moves with a lolloping gait that is something like a horse's trot and a dog's

walk. This unrealistic movement in a live-action film serves to highlight the movement away from true dragons. Despite the awkward movement on land and air, the true dragon is unsurprisingly shown as one of the most powerful varieties of dragon.

Wyvern

While legends of flying serpents abound in Wales, most of them are like wyverns, only without the two legs. When a dragon cannot fly it is classified as a *lindorm*. Wyverns do not tend to be as magical, except in adaptions where their body type is used in place of a true dragon's less natural design. These replacement dragons are notable for having attributes usually assigned to true dragons but only have two legs, rather than four. A particularly venomous type of wyvern in folklore is the deadly Aspis; touching one can be fatal and its bite causes instant death.[32] The wyvern is a common dragon in heraldry; it appears on family crests whenever a member has performed a great deed, either the conquest of a fort, the slaying of a dragon or defeating a powerful enemy.[33] They have been depicted in Britain on baronial seals from as early as 1180 CE.[34] These dragons are usually the more predator-like, swooping in and taking livestock or fighting shepherds. They are also known for possessing a barbed tail that may possibly be poisonous. Within literature, Tamora Pierce depicts the wyverns in *Realms of the Gods* as smaller and weaker than true dragons; additionally, they breathe a noxious fog. This accord with the Western European and British treatment of the wyvern in folklore, as it is rarely a kingdom threatening peril, and is more likely to harass farmers and eat livestock. Hence, Pierce portrays them as not terribly threatening individually, and are only a significant obstacle to heroes in large numbers. Wyverns' lack of

formidability is a common predicament where true dragons and wyverns are depicted together.

Smaug (Wyvern)

(*Desolation of Smaug*)

Figure 2: Smaug

A prominent example of a wyvern supplanting the place of a true dragon in fiction is the titular dragon from Peter Jackson's *Desolation of Smaug*. Smaug is positively enormous, and is probably the largest dragon exhibited within this chapter. Smaug is an interesting case of a wyvern as he speaks, showing that he is a true dragon with a wyvern design. Yet like a wyvern's, Smaug's tail is thick on the end and covered with barbs. He is also very serpentine in his movements, twisting as he creeps. He is a very looming presence, using his size to intimidate while in conversation. This is particularly apparent in his twisting neck that turns away and snaps back, revealing to Bilbo that he cannot be caught unaware. At no point on screen does Smaug relinquish his dominance in the conversation, as shown by his body language.

Figure 3: Smaug (flying)

The wyvern Smaug, as he appears on screen, is a necessary adaption of the true dragon Smaug from Tolkien's original text. For reasons mentioned earlier, the issues of depicting a

dragon on film led to Smaug being a wyvern with characteristics of a true dragon, making him an example of what Linda Hutcheon terms an 'amalgam adaptation.' In his appearance Smaug is undoubtedly more lifelike than Draco. The corners of Smaug's wings have three 'fingers' tipped with claws, and undoubtedly these aid with his movement as they appear quite dextrous. Meanwhile, in flight Smaug is much like a bat, head forwards, shoulders heaving to gain altitude and then gliding for great distances. Smaug has a crocodilian head, but the periodic spines give it an almost bearded quality, showing off a wizened countenance. Finally, when Smaug breathes fire, his belly glows bright and then he unleashes a huge stream of flame. This gives a very dramatic effect to the imminent flames which he is about to unleash. Smaug's breath is like an inferno that exemplifies his power compared to the mere mortals that he faces, like Bilbo and the dwarves.

Lindorm

The *lindorm* is the common dragon found battled in folklore, the great dangerous serpent that shows up and needs a hero to slay;[35] it also can be inferred to be much weaker in comparison to their cousins who are less frequently the victims of dragon-slayers. Probably the most famous example of the *lindorm* is the Lambton Worm, a *lindorm* of great size, slain by the nobleman Sir John. While the German *lindwurm* is indistinguishable from the true dragon, the *lindorm* of Scandinavian and British extraction is more serpentine. These dragons are most likely to be found near sources of water, which gives them a closer kinship to the dragon's aquatic cousin, the sea serpent. Dragons of this variety are distinctive in that they do not fly. Any wings that a *lindorm* might have are either too small for flight, or vestigial. These dragons rarely possess fire breathing; they are more likely to be poisonous. Within modern literature, however, the *lindorm* has a much smaller

presence. Compared to its flying kin, the *lindorm* is less spectacular. The dragon in popular culture has moved beyond the giant snake, and now is associated with the air. In addition, the popularity of the fire drake has caused the watery depictions of dragons to fall from favour and to be replaced by a more dynamic element. These earlier dragons have been left behind in what Hutcheon terms the 'process of creation'[36] that the dragon encounters in its various reinterpretations and recreations over the past centuries. The overwhelming idea of the dragon now is one soaring through the air, clutching the hero with its claws, and setting things ablaze.

The Basilisk (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*)

Figure 4: The Basilisk

The Basilisk is arguably also an amalgam adaptation, a combination of a basilisk and a *lindorm*. While it has the petrification and killing gaze of the monster it is named for, the Basilisk in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* may be considered an on-screen reflection of the *lindorm*. For instance, while it moves and is limbless like a serpent, the Basilisk has a rougher, more lizard-like countenance than the smoother snake. The Basilisk also has a Komodo dragon-like quality in its head and facial features, in addition to the small horns upon its head and spiny ridges along its back. The Basilisk's fangs are sharp, pointed and distinctly serpentine and, like most *lindorms*, the Basilisk is highly poisonous as its venom can kill within the span of a minute.[37]

Like many dragons, the Basilisk in possession of great longevity, being centuries old. Furthermore, instead of snake noises, the Basilisk's cries are more like those of a lizard. Lastly, the Basilisk has all of the watery associations of its folklore counterparts. Much like other *lindorms* the Basilisk dwells in a watery home, as the Chamber of Secrets has a large pool in its centre and the Basilisk's home is located directly above the pool. Additionally, the manner in which the Basilisk can erupt from the water indicates some ability in swimming. The Basilisk is probably the most well-known depiction of the *lindorm* in a modern context. Due to the popularity of Harry Potter, the *lindorm* might experience resurgence in popularity due to its amalgamation with the basilisk.

Long

The *long* is the Oriental dragon. These dragons are seen as mostly benevolent and guardian creatures[38] as opposed to their more destructive cousins in the West. Though there are many different types and variations, they are commonly associated with water and rain. These fertility aspects imply a benevolence that leads to the *long* being frequently worshipped and granted offerings (particularly the *Shen Long*).[39] Due to its divine nature there is a tradition of not showing the entire dragon in drawings, leaving either the eyes not coloured or part of the tail obscured. It was also noted for its nine resemblances: the neck of the serpent, the belly of a frog, scales of a carp, a stag's antlers/horns, an ox's ears, bird's talons, tiger's foot pads, a lion's mane, a camel's head, and the eyes of a rabbit. The closest European dragon in appearance to the *long* is the *lindorm*. Unlike the *lindorm*, however, the *long* is considered at least as clever as a human and is capable of flight. This flight is not always through magic, as winged varieties such

as the *Ying Long* exist, which, unlike many true dragons, possesses the wings of a bird, rather than the wings of a bat. The most well-known variety of *long* is the *Shen Long*. This *long* governs the domains of rain and skies, and is sometimes the subject of worship. A literary example of the *long* is harder to locate in Western writing, however, Michael Ende's Falkor the 'luck dragon'; from *The Never Ending Story*, is in appearance technically a *long*. The reason why I say in appearance, is that Falkor lacks the *long's* typical affinity with water, showing that there is more to a dragon than just its shape.

Haku (*Spirited Away*)

Figure 5: Haku, Human Shape

The animated dragon Haku, also known as the Kohaku River of Hayao Miazaki's *Spirited Away*, is probably the best known example of the *long* variety of dragon to Western audiences. Due to the animated film being of Japanese origin, Haku is technically a *ryou*. For all intents and purposes, however, he can be described as a *shen long* as he possesses a number of common traits with that variety of dragon. Haku is explained as being the embodiment of a (now built over) river. He also flies

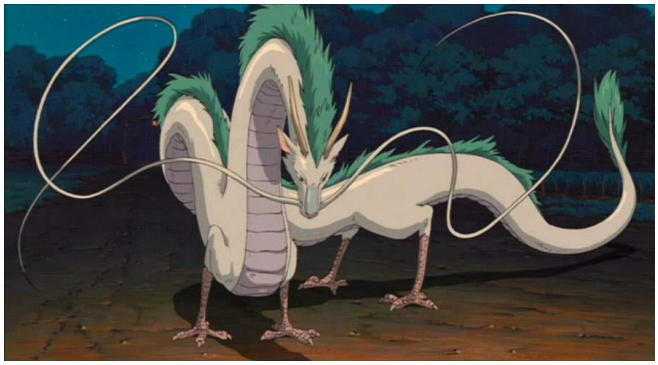

Figure 6: Haku, Dragon Shape

sinuously without wings and changes form whenever he chooses. Haku is also a benevolent figure, like many depictions of the *long*. He also spends much of his time concealing his true form. While he is standing in dragon-shape, Haku's stance resembles that of a stag, as he has tall legs, high body, and long head with antlers facing forwards; yet Haku's face looks somewhat lupine rather than camel or lizard-like. He has an appearance that suggests both predator and prey, a creature that can be dangerous even though he intends Chihiro, the heroine, no harm. In this regard, Haku reinforces the stereotype of the *long* that they are the benevolent (yet not pacifist) counterpart to the more aggressive Western dragon.

Globalised Amalgam Dragons

In a contemporary context the greater interconnection and cross-cultural dialogue in the world has led to dragons who have an intertextual appearance, based on both Eastern and Western traditions. This globalisation has led to a number of dragons who possess qualities of both East and West. Fanfan Chen notes: 'Some contemporary Chinese writers try to create a Eurasian hybrid dragon by making the dragon a malicious spitter of fire or venom on the basis of a Chinese prototype.'[40] This movement is a counterpart to the more benevolent dragons appearing in Western literature. Chen regards this phenomenon as a return to the universality of the dragon that existed prior to the divergence in the perception of dragons caused by various religious and cultural attitudes.

Dungeons and Dragons unsurprisingly has such a blend of Eastern and Western traditions in its spectacular Gold Dragon. Utilising what Hutcheon refers to as a 'process of reception',[41] this dragon has characteristics of both a *long* and a true dragon. It possesses the whiskers of the *long*, and is graceful and sinuous in flight,

yet has bat wings and breathes fire. The fins upon the head resemble the furred mane of the *long* and the Gold Dragon also has a very smooth serpentine body. The dragon also has the typical four legs and two wings of a true dragon and it is completely scaled all over its body. This dragon reinforces the cross-cultural influences mentioned by Chen, taking a Western design of dragon but giving it Eastern additions.

Figure 7: The Gold Dragon

Within the television show *Avatar: The Last Airbender* the dragons are more heavily Oriental, but with some Occidental characteristics. The dragon Fang has bat wings, yet is obviously a *long* in his appearance. Fang has a tail tuft, whiskers and a lion's mane —which are all part of the nine resemblances,— yet it is more heavily scaled than a traditional *Long*. Additionally, while the dragons breathe fire, it is not construed in a negative context as the television show provides alternative philosophies to fire. It is described as both a destructive force and the essence of life and energy, providing a mixture of benevolence and destruction. *The Last Airbender*, in contrast to *Dungeons and Dragons*, starts its dragon in the East and brings it slightly West, exhibiting the opposite end of a

Figure 8: Fang

recognisable *long* having resemblance to a true dragon with its fire-breathing and bat wings.

Complete Process of Recreation

Despite the traditional forms of dragons, some texts exist which do not conform to traditional shapes. These dragons are still recognisable as dragons, yet the creators have played with their appearance so that the reptilian aspects are either altered or downplayed in favour of other animal attributes. Some departures from tradition manage 'the piquancy of surprise' while maintaining the 'comfort of ritual.' These dragons have rebuilt fundamental points from using the previously mentioned 'process of recreation.' Dean DuBois says on the subject: 'How can we keep them dragons while still showing something you haven't seen before?'[42] This practice is exhibited though the various dragon species on screen in the film adaptation of *How to Train Your Dragon*.

The Gronckle has a thick rocky hide and small wings; rather than a lizard or snake its shape and movement is like a bumblebee. It does not breathe fire as such; rather, it lobs molten rocks at its enemies. It is also quite compact compared to the other dragons portrayed. This particular dragon is one of the variations in *How to Train Your Dragon* that uses non-avian or reptilian features. Instead it looks like a combination of a hippopotamus and a bumblebee. The Gronckle does not swoop and soar majestically, like the popular image of a dragon; instead like some

Figure 9: The Gronckle

animals in nature it is both fearsome in its sharp teeth and fire-breathing, yet comical in its manner of flight.

The Nadder from *How to Train Your Dragon* conforms to multiple aspects of a wyvern: it has a barbed tail, two wings and two legs. Its appearance and movement however are avian, for it has a distinctly parrot-shaped head. When moving quickly along the ground it often hops, and rather than lizard-like claws, it has raptor-esque talons. It also has the characteristic, like the manticore of classical mythology, of flinging its tail spines at its foes. This particular dragon is reminiscent of the pre-historic feathered dinosaurs, while also paying homage to other creatures from mythology.

Figure 10: The Deadly Nadder

The Zippleback resembles a flying hydra. With two heads and two tails, it is quite large compared to the other dragons; the heads are serpentine, while body resembles a sauropod. Both heads are required for breathing fire, as one breathes gas and the other ignites it, thus preventing mishaps. Despite its size and ungainly appearance, the Zippleback also has wings and is capable of flight, making it technically a true dragon. This one is perhaps the most interesting, because it defies the 'realistic'

Figure 11: The Hideous Zippleback

appearance of its fellow dragons. Yet the Zippleback at least has a logical explanation for its outlandish appearance, unlike other two-headed dragons such as Devon and Cornwall from the animated film *Quest for Camelot*, who were solely two headed for the sake of comedy.

The Nightfury is an unusual hybridised dragon. It is formed from various animal aspects. As stated by his creators: 'We had to create the ultimate dragon.'

Figure 12: The Nightfury

While the dragon is considered a form of reptile, and the Nightfury is even acknowledged as such, its features are distinctly cat-like with some aspects of a bat. 'We started thinking black panthers, large cats, and not so much reptilian but more mammalian.'[43] It has multiple fins as well as wings for flight and has external ears. This dragon also has extra fins on its tail for manoeuvring and flight, and appears to be the quickest at running on land due to the cat-like shape. The Nightfury is a testimony to how much variation can be done to the dragon while still remaining identifiable.

The last of the dragons revealed in *How to Train Your Dragon* is the Red Death. This dragon is positively enormous and is the only dragon depicted in this chapter that can contend with Smaug for size. It has a spiny back, an armoured skull and a club-like tail. Its head has six eyes that, compared to its size, are quite small. It compensates for its lack of visual acuity with its sense of smell, evidenced by its large nostrils. The Red Death is so big that a full-grown man is barely taller than its foot. The dragon looks primordial and despite its mountain-wrecking size, is

capable of flight. The Red Death is technically a true dragon but, due to its unique appearance, is worthy of special mention. Compared to Smaug, who is lithe and sinuous, the Red Death is a bulky monstrosity who appears to embody ancestral fears of the giant lizards and mammals that battled early humans for dominance of the lands and seas.

Figure 13: The Red Death (far)

Figure 14: The Red Death (Close-up)

The appearance of a dragon is of great importance; how the dragon is depicted will often evoke different associations due to the amount of tradition inherent in dragon art and lore. These shapes, despite the parameters set by tradition, are not totally fixed. There is a vast amount of freedom to transform, amalgamate, and morph the dragon's appearance, while still allowing the creature to remain recognisably draconic. Cahir's tripartite modes of the literal, the traditional, and the radical continue to be valid, although it is the radical modes that are becoming more frequent and interesting, as evidenced by *How to Train Your Dragon*. This transforming is indicative not only of the creativity of the author or artist, but also of the dragon's ability to adapt to new environments, which accounts for its survival through millennia in one form or another. In the past few centuries the predominant change to the dragon's visual representation has been its wings and legs. The twenty-first century, however, has seen further points of departure for the dragon. This is particularly apparent in the perception that, while it is reptilian, its inspirations can come from across the natural world.

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[4] Kamilla Elliott expands this to six possible approaches: psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 133-83.
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[15] *The Technical Artistry of How To Train Your Dragon* in *How To Train Your Dragon*, dir. by Chris Sanders and Dean DuBois (Dreamworks, 2010)
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[17] Simpson, *British Dragons*, pp. 41 - 42.
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[21] Falconer, p. 30.
[22] Falconer, p. 30.
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[28] Carl Lofmark, *A History of the Red Dragon* (Iard yr Orsaf: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1995), p. 46.
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[33] J.C. Cooper, *Symbolic and Mythological Animals* (Northhampton: Aquarian, 1992), p.85.
[34] Simpson, *British Dragons*, p. 122.
[35] Simpson, *Scandinavian Folklore* and 'Fifty British Dragon Folktales', p. 83.
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Chapter 2: The Nature of the Dragon

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The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us.[1]

The principles of adaptation which underpin my discussion of the physical form of the dragon are also central to understanding contemporary representations of the dragon's nature, its mental and emotional life. As with the shape of the dragon, depictions of the nature of the dragon have undergone many mutations and re-inventions, with some authors focusing on the mysteriousness of the dragon, others on the ferocity of the dragon, and still others on the benevolence of the dragon. What is noticeable in modern dragon narratives is a shift away from a perception of the dragon as pure monster to an emphasis on the dragon as unknowable other, a creature with a very different history and outlook to that of humans. Recent scholarship in the emerging field of human-animal studies is helpful in understanding this shift. Philip Armstrong writes: 'As a resource for thought and knowledge, the generic notion of 'the animal' has provided modernity with a term against which to define its most crucial categories: 'humanity', 'culture', 'reason', and so on.'[2] The dragon complicates this binary, challenging the categorisation of what it means to be definitively human as it tends to be depicted as intelligent, rational, and vocal.

Human-animal studies assists with understanding human preconceptions towards animals. In the past animals have been used as place holders and representations of human behaviour. We have discussed animals only in terms of ourselves, without regard to the animals' own rights or importance. This anthropocentric

conceit of humanity limits our capacity to understand the animal on its own terms. The dragon is an animal (even when sentient), so to ignore this field of scholarship is detrimental. However, as a thinking creature, the dragon exists as a reminder that intelligence is not a purely human characteristic. In fiction the dragon is a distinct type of animal that is capable of talking back and eloquently expressing its own opinion.

In addition to human-animal studies, Edward Said's 1977 theory of othering in *Orientalism* is a useful frame for my discussion. Said argues that othering is inextricably connected to the nature of the individual and society, creating an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. While Said's focus is on the East-West dichotomy, his ideas are also applicable to the dragon as Other. Dragons are creatures who exist on the boundaries of civilisation, are rarely integrated into society and dwell in the untamed wilderness.

The binary theory of the Other as 'us' and 'them' does have its limits, however. Gerd Bauman argues: 'the simplicity of this binary grammar is obvious [..] the question is, however, whether we cannot identify rather more complex grammars of selfing and othering.'[3] The dragon is not easily constrained into the opposition of 'us' and 'them', as evidenced by the aforementioned similarities between dragons and humans. Therefore, while theories of the Other are a useful frame, to solely see the dragon as insider or outsider is limiting, particularly give its intelligence. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue that 'the monster is excluded, abjected, not because it is entirely other but because it is at least in part *identical* with that by which it is excluded – with, in this case, the human'.[4] Hence

ideas of the mutant and the uncanny are also necessary when analysing the nature of a dragon and how humans respond to such intelligence.

'No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it.'[5] Dragons are known for peculiar behaviour, none more so than Tolkien's dragon Smaug. Tolkien writes that '[d]ragons may not have much real use for all their wealth, but they know it to an ounce as a rule, especially after long possession; and Smaug was no exception.'[6] The dragons of Tolkien probably influenced much of the construction of the modern dragon as intelligent. Due to Tolkien's experience with Northern European tradition, he serves as a reflection and codification of dragon tradition. Within *The Hobbit*, Tolkien presents the dragon Smaug as a phenomenal example of how the non-human speaking our own language is eerily uncanny. They illustrate the point that whatever similarity these dragons have towards mortals, they are in no way predisposed towards them. The only way for a person to survive encountering these dragons would be to keep the dragon's interest by acting like Bilbo, who engages Smaug's attention with riddling talk.[7] Yet, while Tolkien was drawing from sources such as *Beowulf* and the *Volsungsaga*, his own works went on to influence other authors. Hence many of the writers within this chapter may be viewed in relation to Tolkien, whether they are similar or divergent from his codified dragon.

This chapter concerns itself with the nature of Smaug and his fictional kin. What are their thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and especially, motives? The dragon's nature can affect the entire story; if the dragon is benevolent then it may be either a protective guardian or misunderstood loner. If it is malevolent, like Smaug, then it could pose a threat to populated regions, such as his rampage across Lake-Town

and his destruction of the kingdom of the Lonely Mountain. There are a number of characteristics that convey the nature of a dragon. These are not its powers but rather its psyche and how it acts towards other creatures. These characteristics show how other creatures perceive the dragon and help to define a dragon's place within a world. The nature of a dragon presents a number of uncanny traits that challenge humanity's anthropocentric view of the world. Dragons occupy a space where they are both like and unlike humans, enabling them to act as a critical voice towards an anthropocentric perspective. Julie Sanders states that 'Many fairy tales exhibit a deep rooted anxiety about the figure of the incomer, the outsider, the person or creature from elsewhere.'[8] This is particularly noticeable in the tension between reconciling the dragon with a quasi-human nature, versus the dragon with an uncanny Otherness. If Smaug were simply a large animal then he might be a nuisance and dangerous to encounter, but hardly a dire threat. In recent literature, animals are less likely to be considered enemies and more a natural obstacle. With dragons, therefore, there is a scale of power to identify in a dragon which shows where they fit into a world's wider cosmology.

I have taken to organising an ascending order of states in which a dragon is found. The first state is the Predator. Dragons of this type are hunters and creatures that exist as animals. They are powerful, they are dangerous, but they are no more a threat than any other dangerous beast. This dragon is one of the most common and is best understood through the field of human-animal studies. Next is the Other; this dragon is intelligent, cunning and often possesses a manner of communication with humans either through speech or alternative means. This type of dragon is quite similar to the Predator, yet unlike its lesser kin, is a rival to humans, instead of a nuisance. These are the dragons that begin to challenge the concept of human

supremacy. Within the Other, elements of the uncanny and Edward Said's ideas about the Other come forth, which is indicated in its name. Beyond the Other, the main theories become less reliable as the depictions of these dragons are less frequent. However, the ideas of Other and uncanny do still hold some sway over the stage of dragon, the Elemental. This dragon is akin to a force of nature. They often have dominion over elements, are highly magical, and beyond humankind in both power and understanding. Their attributes also make them creatures which can be worshipped as almost divine; dragons of this stage are often uncaring or benevolent, feeling themselves beyond human concerns. Despite the Elemental dragon's might, however, there is one category beyond them: the Cosmic dragon. Despite being one of the oldest variations, this type of dragon is also one of the least frequently depicted and most unchanging. These dragons are the contemporaries and foes of gods. They are not something that mortals will ever encounter in combat. Dragons of this variety are often involved in the creation or the destruction of the world, whether independently or in conjunction with a deity.

Mental and Cosmic Aspects

> Don't tempt me to show you what I can do by speaking your name and making an effort, mortal. Suffice to say that you could not comprehend the kind of power I have at my command. That my true form would shatter this pathetic gathering of monkey houses and crack the earth upon which I stand.[9]

As Jim Butcher's dragon Ferrovax, in *Grave Peril* demonstrates, there is an unbridgeable gap between dragons and humans. The mental characteristics of a dragon are significant in showing how removed dragons and humans are from each other. This is obvious in the fact that in most depictions dragons think

differently to humans. Traditions previously held dragons as being in opposition to humanity or outside humanity. Authors have in recent works have embraced dragons as beyond and outside humanity instead of simple opposition. Rather than just saying they are outsiders, however, authors portray that dragons think in a different manner to humans. Hence the difference changes from being social to personal, granting a greater level of subjectivity to the morality of characters. Jim Butcher's Ferrovax, from his novel *Grave Peril*, is a dragon that is beyond the scope of any mortal. Such dragons belong to a long-standing tradition, but it is only in recent years that they have acquired prominence. This dragon can change his form, bring a person to their knees with force of will alone, and casually destroy entire cities. His characteristics and nature help to classify him as at least an Other and, more likely, an Elemental class dragon. The dragon's aspects with regard to its nature appear along the spectrum, detailing their levels in the different states. These traits help to classify which stage of power a dragon exists within. A number of these traits overlap and show that the stage in which a dragon exists has varying degrees. To a certain extent this spectrum also loops as a Cosmic dragon has some traits akin to a Predator dragon.

A common response to a dragon by humans and animals is terror. The dragon is seen as a predatory force, the terror resulting from our instinctive fear where the visage of a dragon echoes early human encounters with enormous predators. This characteristic may also be interpreted as a sense of divine awe. The creatures who behold the dragon tremble in the face of a being that exists on a scale far beyond them. This is reflected in their depictions within *Dungeons and Dragons*. Once they reach certain ages and sizes, these dragons have a tendency to send people fleeing in terror. Hence the most frequent response to an elder dragon is,

regardless of the creature's motives, fear.[10] Similarly Diamondflame from Tamora Pierce's *Realms of the Gods* must keep himself unseen or else he will incite a panic.[11] Diamondflame's sheer size and appearance causes people to fear him out of ignorance. The visual aspect of panic-induced fleeing is seen with Draco in *Dragonheart*, where people have become so used to dragon attacks that they will flee in terror at the first sight of them.

A lair is the home for an animal; it carries with it connotations of wildness and concealment and is thus in some ways very different to human ideas of domestication. Yet there is a fairly human characteristic to finding a place, calling it your own, and altering it to suit your desires. This characteristic is symptomatic of a dragon's nature veering toward the Other, particularly the uncanny Other as described by Bennett and Royle: 'the thoughts and feelings which may arise on those occasions when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes unfamiliar, or the unfamiliar becomes strangely familiar'. [12]

A dragon's lair can come in a number of varieties: near a river, behind a waterfall, and the peaks of mountains, but the most common stereotype of lairs is the cave. What they all share is a sense of being simultaneously strange because of their isolation and familiar because of their nesting quality. These lairs are often indicative of the Underworld, the eerie realm into which the hero must venture to confront the otherworldly foe.[13] However, within this context I would argue that a better term for this otherworldly place would be Tolkien's 'the Perilous Realm.'[14] To confront the dragon a person must venture into a place beyond what we normally see and know: 'the dragon's habitat is remote … in direct contrast to the social surroundings from which the hero travels to encounter the dragon.'[15] The

hero must leave behind civilisation, as the dragon is not part of the civilised world. It belongs in the wild and untamed places, hence the popular expression 'Here be dragons.'

Probably one of the most famous aspects of the dragon's nature is its collection of treasure into a hoard. The hoard is the best manifestation of the dragon's vice of greed and desire to possess items. Occasionally this is displayed as an obsessive compulsion on the part of the dragon.[16] The association between dragons and their hoards come from the tradition of dragons as guardian beasts, found in both Eastern and Western mythologies with *long* as the guardians of hidden treasures and the dragon who guards the tree of the Hesperides. Perhaps the most famous mythological example of this character trait, however, would be Fafnir of the *Volsungsaga*.[17] Fafnir was originally a dwarf, whose very greed and lust for treasure turned him into a dragon, exemplifying the nature of the dragon's hoard. The hoard is similarly apparent with the dragon of *Beowulf*, who made his home in a barrow mound for the express purpose of desiring and hoarding the treasure. [18] These two dragons went on to influence Tolkien's Smaug who,[19] was instrumental in popularising the idea of dragons and hoards in the twentieth century. Smaug the Golden is infamous for his conquest of the Lonely Mountain and for his love for his hoard.[20] Subsequent writers have also portrayed dragons in possession of hoards such as the Dragon of Pendor[21] from Ursula K. LeGuin's *Wizard of Earthsea*: '[m]any years had the dragon sprawled on the island where golden breastplates and emeralds lay.'[22] The dragon's lust for treasure is legendary and often reflects distinctly human traits; unfortunately this has created an excess of dragons as allegories for human vice. The appearance of distinctly human traits in its nature establishes the dragon's nature as being Other along the

spectrum. This trait is not wholly malignant, however, as the dragons of Diana Wynne Jones' *The Darklord of Derkholm* also covet treasure, but are more or less benevolent.[23]

Out of the various draconic characteristics which I have found, the most unusual is the dragon as a music lover. This love of music from such an inhuman figure has an uncanny effect. Music is representative of harmony and social order. It also has a very spiritual aspect, with rituals of calling and sending spirits in Shintoism.[24] That the music appeals to its nature denotes a spiritual quality to a dragon. Within *Dragonheart*, Draco is considered a friendly dragon that is very spiritual, concerned with the fate of his soul and possible redemption, yet he also enjoys singing. 'We dragons love to sing when we're happy.'[25] Within this situation Draco's enjoyment for music is an expression of the dragon's benevolence. Music can, however, have other interpretations. For example, in Scandinavian folklore, a *lindorm* was once lured into a fire by a flute player.[26] This particular instance echoes the use of music in calming and taming animals, particularly snake charmers with their pipes, which is unsurprising as the *lindorm* the most serpentine of dragons. In contrast to these benevolent effects, there are the darker connotations to music, as singing is also associated with enchantment and seduction.[27] This is particularly apparent with Cressida Cowell's Green Death in her novel *How to Train Your Dragon*, where 'an eerie singing was coming from the direction of [the dragon's] belly.'[28] The Green Death uses this singing as a means to lure other dragons to it both as servants and as food. Since music is often described as otherworldly and unearthly, it is of little surprise that it is so attractive to creatures *Of Fairië.*

'How shall I put it to a brain *so* much smaller and less clever than mine?'[29] As the Green Death asks Hiccup in *How to Train Your Dragon*, when the dragon is intelligent, it possesses a dangerous cunning and is generally smarter than the average human. This intelligence is something that challenges the human feeling of superiority in our intelligence. These are creatures that also reason, hence 'cogito ergo sum'[30] also applies to them. 'They are more intelligent than even we humans.'[31] The dragons of Tamora Pierce's *Immortals* series are known to be very intelligent, so intelligent that they often find mortals to be tiresome. This level of intelligence results in unsurprising situations where even 'good' dragons consider mortals to be inferior.

Some dragons have the ability to communicate mind-to-mind via telepathy. Such a characteristic is uncanny, that an intelligent being can speak to a person directly without words or movements. Telepathy is a characteristic that takes us out of the real and into the realm of the fantastic and supernatural. Simply, their thoughts are now your own. A more uncanny effect, however, is in the mind-reading aspect of telepathy. This is a breach of what humans think is a sanctuary; everything that they thought was secure and private suddenly is not. The Green Death expresses such a characteristic in using its knowledge of all of Hiccup's troubles and worries to further manipulate him when they are engaged in conversation.[32] The ability to read minds enables a dragon to know a person's innermost secrets, a situation that its victims would find horrifying.

Bennett and Royle argue that '[n]othing is stranger, or more familiar, than the idea of a voice.'[33] Nowhere is this truer than with a dragon. We consider speech a large part of what makes us human, so to see another creature speak, particularly

something so inhuman, is uncanny. A significant figure with this characteristic is Smaug,[34] whose conversations with Bilbo show his intelligence and alien nature. Draco in *Dragonheart* also possesses this characteristic, but uses it as a way to bond with humans rather than alienate them.[35]

Human speech, however, leads into another characteristic of a dragon, conversational manipulation. In this manner of conversation, a dragon endeavours to manipulate their foe into a course of action. This trait is as old as the tempting serpent of Eden and in most cases is an echo of the serpent's corrupting influence. Smaug traps Bilbo in his words to find out the number of his companions and to learn that they visited Laketown; he even causes Bilbo to doubt his companions as to how much treasure Bilbo will be given and its transportation back home. 'Now a nasty suspicion began to grow in his mind – had the dwarves forgotten this important point too or were they laughing in their sleeves at him all the time?'[36] The Green Death manipulates Hiccup in a similar fashion, while also expressing to him the futility of fighting. 'We're *all* going to be eaten SOMETIME. You can win yourself some extra time though, if you're a smart little crabstick.' [37] Instead of manipulating Hiccup against someone, the Green Death instead uses his skills in conversation to break Hiccup's spirits and force him to submit.

The ego of a dragon is both akin to the upper class aristocrat who believes that their advantages make them inherently better. This is a creature who, even if the only factors are the dragon's life span, sentience and physical strength, is by far beyond that of a single human. The attitude that dragons display towards humans is best summed up by Ferrovax from Jim Butcher's *Grave Peril* who, upon meeting a powerful wizard and a famed knight, says: 'I would advise you to be

more humble in the place of your betters.'[38] This innate feeling of superiority is common among all dragons with a human or higher level of intelligence. These dragons see no threat in humans and yet not only challenge but defy our own view point of being the 'the thinking animal'. Coetzee states with regards to captive animals: '[W]e don't hate these animals … merely regard them with contempt.'[39] This is the same way that such dragons consider humans: they do not hate us, they are merely contemptuous.

The life span dragons reveals that their attitudes towards mortals are unsurprising. Many varieties of dragons are extremely long-lived, and some are nearly immortal. This is an attribute shared by both Eastern and Western dragons. The Chinese dragon, being a divine animal, dies of its own accord,[40] while Smaug will live 'practically forever.'[41] This longevity characterises dragons as creatures that are alien and beyond human understanding. Another remark from Jim Butcher's dragon Ferrovax notes: 'Your life is a flickering candle to me, and your civilisations rise and fall like grass in the summer.'[42] This difference in ages gives dragons a near elemental quality because they perceive the world on a far different scale to humans, which means that their motives and actions can have intentions and consequences that we would not even consider. Some of these dragons are as old as mountains and have existed before forests; some may even be older than human civilisation.

Due to their age, it is understandable that dragons can have knowledge of ancient secrets that are hidden from lesser mortals. In Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Wizard of Earthsea*, the Dragon of Pendor attempts to barter these secrets as a way to escape his banishment by the wizard Sparrowhawk. 'There is a horror that follows you. I

will tell you its name.'[43] This knowledge of long-lost secrets continues to deepen the removed nature of the dragon, as it gives them an air of omniscience.

As ancient creatures it is unsurprising that some intelligent dragons are wise and knowledgeable; they are an older and greater species and so try to give mortals the benefit of what they know. While these dragons are more alien, they are also less hostile. Much like the dragon's knowledge of secrets, this wisdom is tied to the dragon's age;[44] wise dragons have grown far beyond the petty concerns of mortals and possibly the interests of younger dragons.

As mentioned previously, some dragons exist in a state that is so far removed from what humans encounter and act on a level so far out of mortal scope that I have labelled them as cosmic. Cosmic dragons, being comparable to deities or divinities in their own right, by their very nature cannot be wholly understood by mere mortals. Additionally, being divine (or a close equivalent) entities they can also not be physically confronted by humans. These dragons, part of a tradition dating back millennia, such as Tiamat, Typhon, Satan, Nidhoggr, Shan Hai King, and various others, are comparatively rarer in contemporary literature. Few definitive contemporary examples of the cosmic dragon exist, such as Alduin and Akatosh of *Skyrim*, as well as Kalessin of *Earthsea*. But there are borderline examples, as found in *Dungeons and Dragons* and Tamora Pierce's *Immortals* series. These dragons have the potential to become close to deities by virtue of living long enough, but their strength as contemporaries to gods is debatable.

'Gods annoy me.'[45] Any dragon that can utter this statement has the potential to be described as cosmic. These dragons are strong enough, if not kill a deity, at

least to make them think twice before starting a fight. Dragons with this status fight on a cosmic scale, usually challenging gods. Such conflicts are often part of the creation or destruction of the world. Perhaps the earliest example of this battle is the Babylonian god Marduk's conflict with the she-dragon Tiamat,[46] which, upon Tiamat's death, led to the world's creation. Dragons of this variety are not always the foes of the gods; occasionally the dragons simply do not acknowledge the authority of the gods.

The dragon is not always in conflict with deities, but dragons of this magnitude generally have an involvement in the creation or destruction of the world. With creation, there are two scenarios. In the former, the dragon is the creator. This usually makes the dragon a deity, possibly the supreme deity. One particular example is hinted at in Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* series in the form of the eldest dragon Kalessin,[47] who is implied to be the demi-urge, Segoy,[48] the being who raised the archipelago from the sea. Such a concept, where the dragon is the creator deity, throws into conflict the anthropocentric idea that man is made in God's image. Bennett and Royle state, 'God is a projection of the human ego on the surrounding universe.'[49] Therefore a dragon as creator strikes at the human ego and forces us to consider the universe differently. The second scenario is the dragon as a foe of the gods and its body is used in the world's creation. This is what occurred with Tiamat: '[Marduk] places half of her above the earth as the sky, fixes it with bars, sets guards, and charges them to not let her waters escape.'[50] The death of the dragon causes the creation of a new world. This is not a dragon that is antagonistic, rather it is the cycle of life and death, in order for life to emerge there must be a great death.

Lastly is the world destroyer, a dragon in its ultimate aspect as the foe of the gods. It will have a role to play in an apocalyptic scenario. Indeed, it is even possible that this dragon will be victorious. While the Dragon of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelations is a potent example of this figure,[51] it is not as great as the Nidhoggr of Norse myth.[52] The appearance of this dragon is not the final conflict, he is the end:

> From the depths below a drake comes flying
> The Dark dragon from Darkfell
> Bears on his pinions the bodies of men,
> Soars overhead. I sink now.[53]

This dragon is the inevitable; after him there is nothing. Perhaps the world is reborn after his passing, but his is the ultimate cleanser of life in the world. This particular type of dragon has an ambiguous fate. Within biblical writings the Dragon of the Apocalypse dies in the battle of the Second Coming; the Nidhoggr however, survives in the world reborn. This type of dragon does not appear with much frequency in contemporary fiction. Since the nineteen eighties however, this variation has experienced popularity within videogames. The most significant of these dragons is 'Alduin the World Eater'; the dragon from *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* who is fated to end the world. 'Alduin will devour all things, nothing can stop him.'[54] This dragon is constructed much like Nidhoggr, in keeping with the game's Scandinavian aesthetic. Much like Nidhoggr, Alduin is a foe beyond the scope of mere mortals; as the character Esbern observes, 'Alduin cannot be slain like a lesser dragon, he is beyond our strength.'[55] Alduin's role is to end the world at the appropriate time to let a new world emerge; he perverts his intended role, however, by attempting to hasten the world's end. While he can be defeated, he is

only ever delayed, not destroyed. ‘Those who overthrew him in ancient times only postponed the reckoning.’[56]

Intelligence and Voice

As discussed earlier in the chapter, one of the uncanny and intriguing aspects of a dragon is its intelligence and ability to speak. While numerous modern examples of verbose dragons exist, in Western writing the progenitor of this phenomenon is quite probably Fafnir of the *Volsungsaga*, one of Tolkien’s inspirations for his dragons within Middle Earth. Yet while the modern dragon is generally an intelligent and eloquent creature, there are still many examples of bestial dragons, as well as dragons which defy convention and, while intelligent, do not speak. This serves as a reminder that while dragons may be intelligent, as mentioned by Coetzee, the requirement of speech is a human conceit. ‘It is language, not food, that ultimately separates us from the animals, even in myths.’[57] In film this is especially apparent as speech is ‘not necessarily easy because of [a dragon’s] reptilian physiology. Crocodiles, Komodo dragons and dinosaurs all lack the kind of articulation that would permit speech and aren’t expressive animals.’[58] Bennett and Royle’s explanation about voice is always linked to an affirmation of identity, so it is interesting to look at the creatures whose speech humans cannot hear and the ways around which they express their intelligence.

Dragons which do not speak and have a mere bestial intelligence are not uncommon. In Terry Pratchett’s *Guards! Guards!*, in contrast to the stereotypical intelligent, magical Noble dragon, there is its animal counterpart, the Swamp dragon. This dragon is, small, usually no bigger than three and a half feet tall and not much more intelligent than a dog. It can be trained like a dog to perform

certain actions or like a parrot to sit on shoulders.[59] While these dragons are relatively tame, this makes them vulnerable to attack by humans out of fear and greed directed at their intelligent and powerful cousins, the Noble dragons, who resemble and act like stereotypical dragons.[60]

George R. R. Martin's dragons, while animal-like, have a contrasting disposition to those of Pratchett. They have the intelligence of an animal, and are vicious and bestial. Despite the efforts of Daenerys Targeryen, who hatched and raised the dragons like her own children, they are wild animals and only distinguish creatures by threat and edibility. This is especially apparent with the dragon Drogon, who kills and eats a child – '[b]ones they were, broken bones and blackened'[61] – and later attacks a gladiator, pit killing and eating both a wild boar and the gladiator, not distinguishing between the two. 'As he began to feed he made no distinction between Barsena and the boar.'[62] Drogon's behaviour evokes an earlier comment by Daenerys: 'A dragon is no slave', which includes slavery to morals and conscience. This complete animalistic nature is contrasted by the stories of dragons that live to be thousands of years old and have grown wise, yet are unfounded.[63] These stories express optimism within *A Song of Ice and Fire* that is not present in the character's reality.

These dragons are shown to possess an intelligence that is only that of an animal. They act more or less on instinct but can in certain instances be trained. Such stories look at a dragon living according to its nature; they have the morality of, and are a danger like an animal, a (usually) large and fire-breathing animal, but an animal nonetheless. This idea of these dragons is probably due to the differing

view of animals and animal rights in the twentieth century. Sandra Unerman writes that:

> The changing role of dragons in modern fiction expresses deeper changes in society, as well as in approaches to fiction. One is a change in the attitude towards dangerous animals, noticeable in Pratchett as well as Dickinson and Rowling.[64]

In addition there is the modern education in relation to animals. We no longer look at animals and consider them evil, as true evil is more likely to come from other humans.

With intelligent dragons there is a greater opportunity to see different motivations in the creatures. Intelligent dragons are not limited to simple animal wants and desires; they act on their thoughts and emotions equally. Tamora Pierce's *Immortals* series displays dragons who are benevolent, but due to age and culture do not see things with the same perspective as mortals; for example a war among mortals is nothing for them to worry about as it would be over within a decade or so.[65] They are also unusual in terms of dragons as they have their own society and form of governance in an age-centric society, where power and standing is based upon age, where their government (the Dragonmeet) is headed by the eldest dragon.[66] This also complicates matters as, due to their different perspective of time, they can take decades to reach a consensus as a nation.[67] Due to their power and longevity though, dragons can only co-exist by minding their own business.[68] They are intelligent and have a form of government, which humans can relate to, yet even with this familiar structure their motivations are very different due to age. While a consensus and reasoning does not work for these dragons, they will pay any debt that is owed to them immediately and are more likely to assist

someone on a personal basis, rather than out of any moral obligation to mortal creatures.

The dragons of *Earthsea* are unusual as they do not gain speech or their renowned cunning until a certain age. As hatchlings and adolescents, they are more or less bestial, yet are loyal to their parent. Once they have achieved adulthood these dragons become solitary and have little care for humans. They will gladly attack them for their treasure, raid them for food, or just as equally leave them alone. When a person meets a dragon there are two possible outcomes, will he eat you or talk to you? The dragons of *Earthsea* are uncaring about humans and treat them with the same disdain that humans often have towards animals; humans are not like the dragons so, with rare exceptions, we are not worthy of their respect.[69] Simply because a dragon is intelligent and acknowledges that humans are clever, this does not mean that he would not prey upon them anyway.

Humans are guilty of the conceit that speech is equivalent to intelligence. We do not consider creatures to be of equal worth if they cannot speak. This argument is not in the sense that animals may have their own speech and that we are too conceited to listen, but that they cannot vocalise coherently.[70] Within *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, dragons are undoubtedly intelligent, yet have no way of speaking. In fact due to their stoic nature and their limited facial expression, they do not even communicate via body language. The spirit dragon, Fang, does not speak, nor does he use body language. Instead, he uses a form of telepathy; it is not telepathy of words as in the *Immortals* series, instead Fang conveys images which it is up to the recipient to interpret. This imparts a more mysterious and uncanny nature to the dragon as it shows they do not think in the same way that a human

does, so symbols and images are more effective than words. In the film *How to Train Your Dragon*, directors Chris Sanders and Dean DuBois portray silent yet ambiguously intelligent dragons. This is particularly apparent in Toothless who, despite a lack of speech, often conveys emotions, desires and feelings through actions, body language, and even laughter. For example, Toothless torments the Viking Astrid with turbulent flying until she apologises for her earlier comments and her treatment of the dragon.[71] Also he has smacked or growled at his rider Hiccup when he wishes to correct the boy's behaviour. Despite a lack of speech and complex communication, Toothless is still able to convey basic thoughts and concepts, although due to the limited nature of the communication, humans have no idea how intelligent he truly is. *How to Train Your Dragon* helps to highlight the conceit that since we cannot understand a person, they are obviously not very intelligent, regardless of their own comprehension.

The reaction towards intelligent creatures' inability to speak is not as difficult a characteristic for humans to deal with as if one actually spoke. Dragons who use verbal telepathy, such as Diamondflame in *Realms of the Gods*, has been mentioned previously as uncanny due to the implications of a voice appearing in a person's head. While it is an uncanny trait it would not be quite as strange as some of the other forms of verbal communication. Arguably the method of communication lessens the dragon's Otherness, as it is unsurprising to see something uncanny speaking via an uncanny means, like telepathy.

Cressida Cowell's novel *How to Train Your Dragon* raises a different issue. The dragons in her novel speak their own language, called *dragonese*. This concept requires that humans first acknowledge the dragons as having a language and

being intelligent, something that is still argued in regard to animals. Coetzee states:

> Since dolphins are not fish but look like fish, and since they are animals but they talk to us in a way that most other animals cannot, they doubly straddle the boundary between our own categories of mammals and fish and thereby threaten our definition of what it is to be human.[72]

In this seem same way dragons look like reptiles yet are not reptiles, they can communicate in ways a snake cannot. Hence they too 'threaten our definition of what it is to be human.' Dragons with their own language are somewhat understandable if we accept them as intelligent; the problem with this situation is that humans struggle to accept anything that confronts what it means to be human.

The human inability to accept animals speaking their own language is still easier to accept than a giant reptile with wings and fiery breath suddenly opening his mouth and communicating in eloquent English. As noted before, we consider language as an affirmation of identity; it truly questions the nature of humanity if our language is being spoken as well, if not better, by not only a different culture or species but a different category of animal altogether. One example of dragons using our speech is Jim Butcher's dragon Ferrovax. This dragon is not only uncanny in his ability to speak, but also, while communication may be symbolic of bridging gaps and opening dialogue as a means of peaceful interaction, Ferrovax is not interested in friendship. Homi Bhabha writes that the colonised other is obliged to mimic the language and customs of the coloniser; this mimicry 'is at once resemblance and menace' because it exposes the absurdity of the colonial enterprise and can act as a kind of subversive counter to imperial ideology.[73] This subversion is precisely what the intelligent speaking dragon does.

It will speak the language of humans, not as a means of bowing to their superiority, but as a means of proving the futility of imposing views and restrictions upon it. The dragon will speak the language better than most humans and use it to further prove its pre-eminence. Ferrovax uses his ability to speak as a form of dominance; he can speak in our tongue, challenge our views and then while we are still recovering from the shock of something like this talking to us, he will enjoy belittling our species and remarking on how easily he could destroy a city.

Morality

Dragons are interpreted with a variety of moralities, often for different reasons in different environments. The authors usually have their own purposes for expressing the dragon's specific morality. The concept can best be expressed in terms of choice, either by author, creator or dragon. The choice involves choosing a morality of evil or benevolence (which is the most allegorical state for a dragon), the choice to be the animal (predator) or not making a choice in behaviour and simply being (amoral). These moralities exist usually on a spectrum from malevolent to predator to benevolent, while the amoral exists outside the spectrum. Viewing a dragon within an allegorical sense was termed 'draconitas'[74] by Tolkien in his lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*. He felt that using a dragon for those particular ends was reductive of the creature. Despite the professor's feelings on the subject, the use of dragons in an allegorical context is still common within fiction, though by no means the sole expression of draconic morality. In truth, writers are more likely to present the dragon as predator, likely owing to the changing views towards animals, or as amoral. This predisposition to the amoral dragon is likely influenced by the Tolkienian dislike

of allegory, but also by the desire to see dragons not as an embodiment of something, but rather a different intelligence with its own thoughts and emotions. This preference for amorality does not, however, eliminate the malevolent or benevolent dragon from literature, rather it reduces their level of dominance.

The malevolent dragon is well known in European folklore and literature. 'While there were some malevolent dragons prior, they truly began to propagate in Christianised Europe where they became a symbol of paganism and the forces of the Devil.'[75] The most common and influential malevolent dragon would, once again, be Fafnir. He is a man or dwarf so consumed by greed that he transforms into a dragon. He is an intelligent wicked force, as shown in his conversation with Sigurd.[76] This makes him quite distinct from the purely metaphorical dragons representative of paganism and wickedness like the dragon of Saint George.

A dragon's hoard when used as an allegory (particularly in what Tolkien decried as being *draconitas*) expresses a malevolent dragon's sin of greed which shows the dragon as a creature with a wicked and selfish nature. The lair, meanwhile, provides a focal point to illustrate the place where all of the dragon's malevolence may emerge. As discussed earlier, the two ur-examples for this concept are Fafnir and the fire drake of Beowulf, who inspired Tolkien's Smaug, which was the codifier of the concept in modern literature..

The draconic ego in a malevolent dragon is generally a sin of pride. The dragon feels that its superiority allows it to treat humans how it will because they are 'lesser creatures'. These dragons are heavily in favour of the survival of the fittest. Also, while human speech is not evil, it can lead to manipulation. When a

malevolent dragon is a manipulator he is a tempter. The creature is depicted as a figure of wickedness and sin, manipulating the hero either by trying to make him give in or to turn him against his comrades or quest. Cressida Cowell's Green Death in *How to Train Your Dragon* is one who exemplifies this viewpoint in his conversations to Hiccup about everyone being food eventually and the large devouring the small.

On a cosmic scale, the malevolence of dragons with the power to destroy the world[77] is self-explanatory: if a dragon rises and if it wins, the world is gone. The strength to challenge gods is also fairly simple. This is a dragon that knows it can confront the gods, and wants to prove it. When dragons with this strength battle gods, it is generally on opposite sides and the outcome is frequently apocalyptic. Most of these figures are now consigned to myth and folklore, and such 'World Eaters' are quite rare. Alduin of *The Elder Scrolls* is one of the few apocalyptic malevolent dragons popularised in modern media. Yet he aims to end the world prematurely. While his role is cosmically destined, he perverts this fate by using it as an excuse to oppress lesser creatures.

The Predator dragon is a creature able to hunt anything, including people. Its particular characteristics in this regard are related to it as the hunter. The Hungarian Horntail in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is one particular example of the predator dragon. It is stronger than any one human and even a band of humans. To fight it alone with your own strength is the domain of dragon-slayers. The hides of these dragons are very tough, so simply hitting them will not always bring victory. The size of these dragons is often considered as a factor in how dangerous it is. A dragon is much, much bigger than a human, this serves to

increase its formidability as a predator and that it will likely not be content with only one human per meal. It is unsurprising therefore, that when confronting the Hungarian Horntail, Harry Potter was forced to used creativity and unorthodox tactics to overcome his opponent.[78]

This variety of dragon is most commonly found in folklore, where its presence and appetite makes it a danger that needs to be put down. The Gwiber of Llanfair[79] is an example of common unintelligent predatory dragon that would attack both humans and livestock. Due to the peril that the Gwiber presents to the populace of Llanfair, they come up with a plan to kill it. In contexts such as this, a predator dragon is often slain for the same reasons that a feral dog is put down, as while it is not always acting out of malice, it poses a danger to a civilised environment and must be killed for the safety of the community.

If a predator dragon is sapient, then it may have a draconic ego. This ego, distinct from that of a malevolent or benevolent dragon, is the dragon's casual disregard for humans as anything more than a potential food source, rather than any kind of justified beliefs about inherent superiority of culture, age, or knowledge. This is the attitude held by Cressida Cowell's Green Death. He simply thinks of humans as meals to be eaten, giving them little real regard.

Benevolent dragons are usually the more intelligent variety. Just because they are benevolent, however, does not mean that they cannot be destructive. They are not reduced or domesticated; rather they have chosen to work to the benefit of others. They are the more empathic dragon. There are numerous *long* within folklore that are benevolent. In particular there is the winged-*long* who is a companion to the

hero Yu who aids the hero in his various quests such as battling the great serpent Hsiang Yao and constructing the Dragon Gate.[80] In western tradition, however, we are only recently beginning to accept such creatures.

Draco of *Dragonheart* is a distinctly European dragon with virtually no Oriental characteristics whatsoever, yet he is also benevolent. As previously mentioned, Draco uses his ability to speak human languages as a means of conveying his good nature. As benevolent dragons are also the most empathic of their kind it is unsurprising that they are often depicted possessing wisdom and offering healing. The power of healing particularly depicts the dragon in its most benevolent incarnation; healing is a preservation of life and indicative of a creative force and is a power virtually always aligned with good. Draco particularly shows this property by granting half of his heart to the dying Prince Einen as a way to save his live. In this sense there is also the granting of good luck a show of benevolence and prosperity; for example, Draco's actions create a prosperous kingdom and bless the land after his death. Such abilities show a narrative trend that requires a manifestation of the dragon's benevolence.

While Draco does not have these particular abilities, benevolent dragons sometimes engage in weather control and shape-shifting. It is common with benevolent dragons to engage in an 'angel unaware' scenario or to be a helpful trickster; when they alter the weather it is usually without people being aware and when they change shape it can be to assist without revealing their true identity. In Hayao Miazaki's *Spirited Away*, the character of Haru at first appears to be a young spirit boy. He goes out of his way to help the heroine Chihiro rescue her parents, yet despite being very knowledgeable, there is nothing unusual about the

boy. It is not until much later that Haru is revealed to actually be a *ryou* or Japanese *long*. This disguise allows Haru to assist Chihiro without frightening her and also move about indoors and speak, whereas in his dragon-shape he is quite large and unable to verbally communicate.

The last characteristic of a benevolent dragon is in his creation of the world as a divine figure. It brings order to the primordial chaos, rather than being an aspect of the chaos itself. This dragon is a being of order and structure rather than freedom. Dragons of this variety are few, however, the most applicable candidate from my research is Kalessin, also known as Segoy, from *Earthsea* who is implied to be the demi-urge that raised the archipelago lands from the seas. Due to the cosmic status of such ability and despite the perceived benevolence of these dragons, they are still unfathomable. What may be perceived as a benevolent action may imply other motives on a scale which regular mortals are unable to perceive.

Outside of the spectrum of morality, there are dragons that see themselves as neither good nor evil. They do not act out of malice or a desire to destroy; they simply act according to their natures. In controlling the weather and manipulating the forces of nature a dragon is not inherently good. These powers are, in this circumstance, indicative of the creative and destructive forces of nature. The dragon can have all of the morality of a hurricane or a blizzard; it does not discriminate, nor does it care. Such is the case with the dragon Winter, from Tanith Lee's short story 'The War that Winter Is'. He is indiscriminate in his actions, and while he is the antagonist and an obstacle, he simply brings the cold and ice like a force of nature and is treated as such, rather than an evil foe. This

dragon is considered to be the embodiment or avatar of winter. 'For it *was* ice.'[81] The dragon is also considered to be ancient and far beyond mortal scope as it is possibly as old as winter.

Certain dragons in both the Eastern and Western traditions conform to this variety of dragon. The stories and folklore in Wales about dragons implies that while they bring the rain, which is benevolent, they are also the bringers of storms and lightning. The cosmic figures such as Tiamat and Typhon may also be considered as amoral, since their conflicts with the gods were not about good versus evil, but rather order versus chaos.

When it is intelligent and expressive of its views the amoral dragon is uncaring towards mortals. Mortals are considered to be dumb apes, smarter than most animals but in the same way that we consider dogs smarter than fish. Jim Butcher's dragon Ferrovax expresses this kind of arrogance and contempt towards humanity, as noted earlier in this chapter. He considers all of humanity to be little more than 'monkeys' and finds our lives fleeting and not worthy of his time.

What may also be a perfectly normal action to an amoral dragon (razing a town after a piece of treasure is stolen) would be reprehensible to a human. A dragon of this sort may then watch amused at human antics, considering them to be small and petty compared to the larger, grander and superior concerns of a dragon. They can also look upon human acts with disgust and contempt for our hypocrisy; 'we never burned and tortured and ripped each other apart and called it morality.'[82] The noble dragon of *Guards! Guards!*, upon learning about human behaviour, is completely horrified at human duplicity. As it will act according to its nature, the

dragon does not claim to have any moral justification for its actions. It is genuinely amoral, or above morals, operating in a more animalistic world of need, appetite and action. Such dragons serve as effective counterpoints in revealing the flaws and trappings of human civilisation, reiterating the social critique that the modern dragon has produced.

The modern amoral dragon has thus a different status within literature; by rejecting the constraints of the good and evil spectrum it can be compared to the Gothic villain. It ignores human social conventions, possesses greater agency than its diabolically evil or honourable and helpful cousins, and acts more on personal whim and desire. This grants greater agency to this particular type of dragon in fiction. It is allowed to err and achieve without expectations on how it should be. By creating dragons with a degree of amorality and rejecting the confines of absolutes, authors encourage a greater respect for an intelligent dragon's agency.

The nature of a dragon is multi-faceted and complex. The entire way in which we think about a dragon's nature has been affected by our own meditations upon human nature. As stated previously, human-animal studies give an insight into the nature of animals, which aids in understanding the dragon, as it is very animal-like in appearance and, at times, its behaviour (if not in terms of its intelligence). Being both human and animal, as well as somewhat alien, the dragon is a difficult creature to define. While cosmic dragons have remained relatively static in their interpretation, this is justified by their very status as being far removed from mortality. Hence the more radical departures from tradition occur more frequently with dragons that are closer to humanity, such as ones who are Other. Noticeably, one of these points of departure, the hypnotic evil eye, comes from the most

traditional author Tolkien, showing that even the staunchest adherents to the dragon tradition must make some changes.

There is also an increased contemporary rejection of allegory in favour of predatorial or amoral dragons. These dragons can make their own choices based upon a separate way of thinking, rather than being confined to human morality, which allows the dragon to better serve as a critical voice towards human ideas. Bennett and Royle write:

> …the question of the human is provoked in literary texts above all by means of what is not human, and in post-romantic literature in particular by the presentation of monsters and mutants. By presenting beings that are specifically and spectacularly *not* human, that are precisely configured as deviations from the human, literary texts allow us to find ourselves, in Wallace Stevens words, "more truly and more strange".[83]

Furthermore the prevalence of the Tolkienian intelligent dragon allows the creature to articulate its difference to humans in a thoughtful and eloquent manner. Perhaps as creatures both human and animal, yet most often intelligent, the dragon is an ideal creature to be issuing such challenges and to point out our own faults and hypocrisy.

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Chapter 3: Dragons and Magic

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The monster is both of nature and beyond it.[1]

Within fantasy, dragons have long been associated with magic. This is in no small part due to their status as the authenticating symbol of fantasy fiction. As J.R.R. Tolkien writes: 'The dragon has *Of Faërie* written plain upon him.'[2] A dragon is a giant flying, fire-breathing reptile. Its existence breaks a number of natural laws, so it is no surprise that the reality-defying force of magic is used as an explanation. In understanding the connection between dragons and magic the scholarship of anthropologists and cultural theorists is useful. The work of Bronislaw Malinowski is particularly significant. He argues that all cultures are imbued with a sense of magic, which is used to explain that which is not immediately rationally or scientifically evident: 'We find magic wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range.'[3] Magic has always been a way to make sense of what is not understood. It is also a means to control the uncontrollable. Yet at the same time it is a force of defiance, it defies the rational, breaks free from order, and is a force for liberation. The idea of self-determination which magic represents remains attractive, even in an age where the reality is considerably more rational. As Dorothy Hammond writes: 'Magical power reflects the capabilities of the self and mana, the dynamic forces of the physical universe.'[4]

Magic is a force that sets dragons apart from humanity; as discussed in Chapter 2, dragons do not think in the same way or have the same concerns as humans. Theories of othering are thus once more applicable. Edward Said writes:

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.[5]

With regard to Said's comments, the magical realm of *Faërie*, which Tolkien defines as the home of dragons, can be seen as a kind of Orient. It is an exotic, mystical, strange attractive place, so its inhabitants and their appearance or abilities are not fully understood and held apart. In this context, Said's ideas about the Other are useful to understanding dragons and magic. Just as Said argues that the colonised is perpetually constructed and defined by the coloniser, so too are dragons perpetually constructed and defined by humans. This particular understanding is evident in my research, as few texts provide a narrative from the dragon's perspective. The most prominent of these is Tamora Pierce's short story 'The Dragon's Tale' where the story is narrated in the first person from the perspective of a young dragon. This dearth of draco-centric narrative voices reinforces the dragon's status as Other.

Malinowski is alert to the way in which magic is about both continuity and perpetual creation. He comments: 'Magic moves in the glory of past tradition, but it also creates its atmosphere of ever nascent myth.'[6] Thus duality is symbolic of fantasy representations of the dragon's magical abilities, which tap into 'past tradition' but are also perpetually renewed. Here, we are back in the by now familiar territory of adaptation theory. To reiterate the way in which these theories

continue to underpin my discussion in a fresh way, the connection between dragons and alchemy forms a useful analogy. At its core, alchemy is about the process of transmutation, the changing of one substance into another. There is a long association between dragons and alchemy, with dragons used as the alchemical symbol of mercury or quicksilver. The Black Dragon represents the start of the alchemical process in which the metallic substance to be transformed is pulverised and heated, its blackened, tarnished form symbolising death and decay. The Green Dragon is representative of the indwelling life force which gives the metal its properties. The crystallisation process which it symbolises speaks of taming that which is wild and unmalleable. Finally the Red Dragon speaks of the transformation of chaotic First Matter into the Philosopher's Stone – the alchemical lodestar.[7] The Red Dragon is a particularly fitting analogy for this chapter as recent representations of dragons at times look backwards to the 'First Matter' of mythology and ancient texts such as *Beowulf* and the *Volsungsaga*, and at others seek to transform this source material into something new and strange.

While twentieth and twenty-first century authors draw upon the long cultural tradition of dragon within myth, folklore and literature, they also include their own innovations, or 'philosopher's stones', such as dragons breathing ice, instantaneously transporting themselves at will, becoming sources of magic, or being devoid of magic entirely. Once again, the manner in which authors represent and appropriate this tradition varies. Each author creates and perceives their fantasy universes differently, and thus inevitably, the magic and, by extension, the dragons will have different variations. Sometimes the author draws from the Eastern legends and envisages dragons as the original wielders of magic, who then pass their skill on to mortals. Other stories regard the body parts of the

dragon, especially the heart and blood, as magical and containing a variety of uses. The dragon is also depicted as possessing a wide variety of magical abilities; these can range from invisibility to control of the weather. More interesting is the dragon who has an innate and instinctive knowledge of magic, which they automatically know and which is a part of who they are. The most intriguing aspect of the association between the dragon and magic, however, is where the dragon is the source of magic. Dragons produce this power, while wizards and sorcerers merely make use of the excess.

My discussion of dragons and magic is divided, therefore, in three stages: spare parts that mortals can use or Magic Fodder; magical abilities that humans can understand and learn, or Mortal Magic; and lastly the Magic *Of Faërie*. Mortal Magic is what I have labelled the variety of magic that is most commonly encountered and theorised in the field of Anthropology. What is significant about this magic is that it requires what Malinowski terms 'traditional integrity,'[8] the magic requires a source or origin that must be passed down from an external agent for a magician to utilise. The last magic that is beyond mortal comprehension, it is the magic of supernatural entities. Dorothy Hammond argues: 'Because most supernatural belief systems contain personified and nonpersonified conceptions of supernatural power, the criterion of personification only rarely permits definite assignment.'[9] In contrast to Hammond, I would argue that dragons are definitely personified entities of supernatural power, and their abilities do not require the same origin or integrity of Mortal Magic, hence why I term their powers Magic *Of Faërie*.

Magic Fodder

Magic does not simply get used by a dragon, but permeates its entire being, passing the extraordinary onto various body parts. This is a tradition that has existed in folklore for centuries, with parts of a dragon used in rituals, spells and (particularly in China) folk medicine. Additionally, within the *Volsungsaga*, Sigurd, after slaying Fafnir, consumes his heart. The dragon's heart grants Sigurd the cunning of beasts and on tasting the blood is able to speak to birds.[10] This concept is carried on within contemporary fiction where dragons' hearts, blood, and even bones have uses for magic. These contemporary uses of Magic Fodder usually mirror the significance of the body parts. Departures from tradition only occur in adding properties, rather than changing them.

The heart is a symbol with many interpretations; in Ancient Egypt it is the mind and soul, in Chinese symbology it represents intelligence and spirit, and in the West it is also an emblem for the emotions.[11] Within J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, the heartstring of a dragon is used as a power source for magical wands. This implies that the source of some wands is a dragon's spirit. The dragon is so magical that its heart is used in creating the most important tool for wizards. This practice does lead to a number of unfortunate implications however; as it leads the reader to ask just how many dragons had their hearts taken from their corpses to make these wands? In *Dragonheart*, in contrast, the eponymous heart is used by its dragon, Draco. He demonstrates the ritual that can enable a dragon to share half of its heart with a human. 'Half my heart to make you whole, its strength to purify your weakness.'[12] While Draco initially feels that his heart could temper the evil spirit and emotions of Prince Einen, it has another side effect. The heart grants Prince Einen immortality for as long as Draco lives. Though both feel one another's pain, in order for Einen to die the dragon must first be slain. Draco's

heart is viewed as a benign object that becomes corrupted by Einen's wickedness, rather than simply a source of power. Within both of these texts a dragon's heart is a powerfully potent object and can be used as a means to tap into a dragon's spirit power.

As equally powerful a totem as the heart, blood is frequently associated with life force and is generally considered to be sacred. It is a potent totem and can be described as the essence of a creature. It is unsurprising therefore that the blood of a dragon is considered to be so magically powerful. This idea has some basis within folklore and botany, with the plant resin dragon's blood used in a variety of cures and alchemical practices.[13] In addition, certain tellings of the *Volsungsaga* depict the sword of Sigurd as tempered in dragon's blood.[14] Again within the realms of *Harry Potter*, Dumbledore, the learned mentor of Harry, is known to have discovered the twelve uses for dragon's blood. Although we are not informed of the exact uses of the blood, it is likely to be as an ingredient in various spells and potions. In *A Song of Ice and Fire,* an ancestral connection to dragons grant characters power. The descendants of the dragon-riding lords, the Targaryens, refer to themselves as the 'Blood of the dragon',[15] and occasionally produce scions with magical abilities. This is embodied in Daenerys Targaryen, as she is immune to fire and is able to quicken and hatch three previously dead dragon eggs.

As well as the blood and heart, other parts of dragons are utilised. Within Chinese folk medicine dragons' bones are said to possess medicinal properties.[16] Within the *Harry Potter* series dragon-hide and teeth are often used in clothing manufacture due to its durability and fireproof nature. *A Song of Ice and Fire*

views dragons in the same fashion, for example dragon bones are favoured in crafting bows as they are as tough as iron and far more flexible. It is also implied that dragons are involved in crafting the magical 'Valyrian steel', also known as 'dragonsteel', perhaps using their fire to craft the blade as Daenerys makes reference to 'dragonforged swords'.[17] The varied nature of a dragon's body parts implies that the rewards of slaying one, should a person be able to do so, are potentially quite lucrative. This practice also has links to the reward of the hero in slaying a dragon, which will be addressed later in the thesis.

Perhaps the most intriguing magical aspect of a dragon is the 'Dragonstone.' Seen in several examples of folklore and art work they are often considered a source of a dragon's power. Pliny referred to them as 'draconite' and according to Ernest Ingersoll: 'The alchemists identified this carbuncle with their own Philosopher's Stone containing the secrets of death and resurrection.'[18] Oriental artwork abounds with images of dragons and pearls; Jorge Luis Borges claims that the dragon's pearl is the source of its power.[19] Outside of the East the idea of the Dragonstone is quite obscure, potentially due to the aquatic associations of pearls (which these stones predominantly appear as) and the domination of fire as a core aspect of the dragon in Occidental narratives. The only contemporary author to provide a definitive example of such items, however, is Christopher Paolini and his *Inheritance Cycle*. In this series, a dragon keeps its soul within a stone called an *eldunari*; this stone is usually within the dragon's body, but it can be expelled and stored elsewhere. The stone is a source of magical energy and can act as a means for the dragon to continue existing long after its body has been destroyed. To have a potent stone as the source of a dragon's power implies that the power is given to them, rather than it being naturally occurring. This also has the

implication that if power is given by a physical source then it can also be taken. This idea is explored within the *Inheritance Cycle* through the character Galbatorix who took and enslaved *eldunari* as sources of magical power.

By ignoring their intelligence and placing their value primarily upon their body parts, humans disregard the notion of the dragon as an equal agent and view it as simply parts to turn a profit. This reduction of dragons into a commodity presents the same ethical dilemma as the hunting of whales. Both whales and dragons are frequently acknowledged as possessing human or at least near-human intelligence, yet like the harvesting of the dragon's heart, blood, and bones, so too have whales been hunted for oils, baleen, blubber, and meat. Within fiction this is perhaps the most awful use of dragons, particularly in regard to human-animal studies. The only consolation is that at least dragons are better equipped to deter their would-be entrepreneurial hunters.

The Powers of a Dragon

The elements at their command, power over their own form, and the ability to gaze into your mind; dragons have a number of abilities which may be deemed magical. These powers can vary in quantity and combination. Each power has its own uses and connotations with regard to the dragon. By looking at the connotations of each of these magical powers the dragon's nature can be further determined and understood. These abilities have been grouped into the following categories: the old and traditional powers of the *Elemental*, the relatively recent *Mental* abilities, the also new *Travel and Movement*, and the traditional abilities of *Physical Alteration*.

Malinowski states: 'Pursuits such as war and love, as well as certain forces of destiny and nature such as disease, wind, and weather are in native belief almost completely governed by magical forces.'[20] In this sense it is understandable that dragons as personified supernatural forces will have governance over fundamental forces of nature such as the elements. In turn, the particular elemental traits of the dragon will affect how it is viewed by a culture.

Fire is the most iconic weapon in a dragon's arsenal. Fire is the element most commonly associated with the dragon, after all 'A dragon was air and fire.'[21] The element is connected with speed, anger, ferocity and danger. Such characteristics are unsurprising for a dragon; they are seen as powerful and dangerous creatures. This fiery nature also displays the dragon as being, symbolically, solar, and due to its fire-breathing nature such a dragons is, externally at least, resistant or even outright immune to flames. To quote George R. R. Martin: 'Fire cannot kill a dragon.'[22] The flames of a dragon are also indicative of a person's death, the fire drake of *Beowulf* as a creature of fire echoes a funeral pyre. The words of Smaug, though blatant in their expression, perhaps describe the dragon and flames best: 'I am fire, I am death.'[23] The intriguing part about the fire however, is that it is also the element of enthusiasm, intuition, vitality. '[Fire]'s energy and life.'[24] So the associations can also be positive.

'Flesh and blood will never outlast the ice.'[25] A common modern counterpart to fire, the ability of a dragon to breathe ice is a concept that is hard to trace. Its appearance in popular imagination is at least as old as the first edition of Gary Gygax's *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game in the 1970s, though it is potentially much older. It shows an interesting dichotomous relationship to the

fire-breathing dragon. While fire represents passion, enthusiasm, lust and anger, ice is colder and more unfeeling. An argument can thus be made that if a fire dragon is solar, then potentially an ice dragon is lunar. A dragon that breathes ice also gives the impression of being dispassionate and beyond mortal attachments, such as the dragon Winter in Tanith Lee's short story 'The War that Winter Is': 'Its breath was ice. Its breath blew from the gut of winter.'[26] This dragon is an enemy of humans, because winter is an enemy of humans. It cannot be defeated as it is essentially a force of nature. Despite the amoral connotations, ice is not solely cold and unfeeling, it can also be cooler tempered and constructive, as shown by the White Bewilderbeast in *How To Train Your Dragon 2*. This ice-breathing dragon uses his powers to create a sanctuary for all dragons and is unlikely to be hasty and rash with his actions. As with fire there are both positive and negative connotations with ice.

The power over the weather is a power of gods. It is unsurprising given the dominance of dragons within fantasy and folklore that many possess this power. Weather control with dragons can take on a number of meanings, each with its own interpretation. Dragons of myth have often been credited with creating rainfall and storms. Both the Welsh and the Chinese have seen the dragon as a bringer of rain. Rainfall is a symbol of fertility, and so it is often a symbol of benevolence. Whirlwinds and water spouts are also said to occur when dragons fly into the air. Meanwhile, the creation of wind is another Oriental trait, as this power is also considered a distinctly divine attribute. A dragon that is the source of the winds is usually a servant of a god, or an outright deity.[27] Last amongst the storm-related powers is thunder and lightning. This is exemplified by the word *draig*, an archaic Welsh word for lightning that means dragon.[28] Whether

produced from the dragon's mouth or conjured in a storm, lightning is connected with divine strength and is a symbol of kingship.[29] Such connections with lightning and dragons make it unsurprising that in China and Britain the dragon has been used as a royal crest. In a contemporary context, such weather-based abilities have found popularity within games. In *Skyrim* the World-Eater, Alduin, has the ability to conjure a storm to hamper the protagonist while they fight. In the table-top game *Dungeons and Dragons* the Blue and Bronze dragons breathe lightning distinguishing them from their ice- and fire-breathing kin.

'Was that an earthquake?'…'That lad, was a dragon.'[30] Dragons with the power to rock the very earth would seem to be malevolent, but in some cases the tremors they cause are unintentional, and are simply due to their size, not malice. Whether they are malicious or not is still up for debate, but the creation of earthquakes is more indicative of an elemental nature than a malevolent disposition. The *Li Lung* of Chinese folklore is one particular example; he is said to have domain over the earth, so causing earthquakes is an elemental power of his and possibly a conscious action.[31] In contrast Smaug, as adapted by Peter Jackson, causes earthquakes from his sheer size and strength, rather unknowingly.[32] The tremors that he creates are merely from moving around beneath the mountain, and he is possibly not aware that his waking up even has this effect. Within this elemental quality there is a reemphasis on the indiscriminate nature of the elements, reinforcing the idea that at times the dragon is something that whether good or bad, its actions may be indiscriminately destructive.

Within my family folklore, as well as a number of other cultures, fog and mist is representative of the uncanny and the otherworldly. As my father has said:

'there's something fey the fog.' Sigmund Freud even refers to it in his essay 'The Uncanny': 'The *unheimlich* mist called hill-fog.'[33] Yet fundamentally it is another manipulation of the weather. The wyverns of Tamora Pierce's *Realms of the Gods* use the fog as a weapon, breathing it as noxious yellow mist. In contrast, the *long* of Chinese myth is depicted in art as breathing clouds and fog as part of their beneficent control of the weather. The fog's association with the otherworldly and with dragons is representative of it being *Of Faerie* or from the Perilous Realm and reinforces that whether it is good or evil, a dragon is not a creature from the realms of normality. Dragons are forces of nature made manifest. They are an externalisation of anxiety towards the perils of the natural world. Hence in some situations they are humanity's fears made manifest.

The mental powers of a dragon are among the most eerie and uncanny; it belies the dragon's nature as Other, blurring the line of difference between human and animal. The powers relate to a strong will and a conscious mind, but cause unease at the strangeness of the very human qualities in a non-human entity. Arguably, these powers of the mind, while less visible, are also important signifiers of the inherent mental differences between dragons and humans.

'A single word ran in his head, deep and clear. *Eragon*.'[34] Telepathy, or the ability speak with the power of one's mind, is an ability that is uncanny. When the voice is spoken within your own mind, you begin to question which thoughts are yours and which belong to the dragon. Bennett and Royle argue that it represents the invasion of what people consider to be their most private of places, their mind.[35] In Christopher Paloini's *Inheritance Cycle* all dragons, both good and evil, have the ability to communicate with their minds; they even impart this power onto

their Riders, which in turn distances their companions from humanity. Oddly enough, however, most dragons with this form of speech are actually benevolent.

Mind reading, however, is a power that is a more aggressive invasion of a person's mind. While related to telepathy, this ability also grants an almost omniscient quality to a dragon. It does not merely speak into your mind, but knows your thoughts. Dragons of this kind are generally of the large and exceedingly powerful variety. While the mind-reading aspect is often in the possession of benevolent dragons, like Diamondflame from *Realms of the Gods* and Scales from *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*, in the hands of an evil dragon it is truly terrifying. Green Death in *How to Train Your Dragon* uses his ability to see all of Hiccup's fears to break his will and give in to be eaten. 'Let me get this straight … You know all about my father, and me not being a Hero and everything?' 'I can see things like that.'[36] The dragon is in absolute control at all times and it is only his falling asleep that saves Hiccup from being devoured. Mind reading can be a double-edged sword; it both allows for a greater level of understanding, but can also lead to exploitation of this knowledge, and transforms a means for co-operation into a weapon.

With his mind or words a dragon can twist a person's thoughts and bend them to their will. This particular ability bears some resemblance to the ancient concept of the evil eye that can curse a person. 'One of the most uncanny and wide-spread forms of superstition is the dread of the evil eye.'[37] This acts as either hypnosis or a curse when the dragon shows his strength of mind as well as body, dominating or ruining a foe with his strength of will. The advice 'Don't look into the dragon's eye!' is quite common in contemporary writings about dragons, yet surprisingly is

a relatively recent addition to dragon-lore as it appears to have its source in Glaurung from Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*.[38] '[Túrin] fell under the binding spell of the lidless eyes of the dragon, and was halted moveless.'[39] Glaurung's powers mean that any would-be slayer needs to confront him without looking at him. In a mixture of Tolkien's hypnotic dragon's eye, and the musical dragon mentioned in Chapter 2, is the Green Death from Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon*, whose hypnotising song forces its prey to stop resisting and allow themselves to be eaten. Both varieties of dragon use this power as a method to subdue their would-be slayers. They pit their minds against their foe as a way to break their resolve and show the dragon's position as the dominant predator.

The dragon's abilities regarding travel display the dragon's freedom from petty mortal constraints. The dragon rejects societal constructs and is free to go forth and be itself without concern for judgement and castigation. The ability to fly unaided is one that is associated with the supernatural Other. Flight in this fashion is most commonly found among the Oriental dragons, particularly the *long*. As dragons with this ability are almost exclusively *long* they also tend to be benevolent. In China, this power is associated with immortality, strengthening the claim of the dragon as a semi-divine being. This ability gives the dragon a greater removal from the familiar and, by defying the natural laws that mortals must follow, continues to support his uncanny nature. Falkor from *The Neverending Story* is a well-known literary example of unaided flight: 'They swim in the air of heaven as fish swim in water.'[40] Yet Falkor is not a true *long* as he is a creature of fire and hates the water. Haku from Hayao Miazaki's *Spirited Away* is a more accurate *long* and an excellent visual example of this type of flight, moving sinuously through the sky like an eel in water.

'Do you think we dragons fly only on the winds of this world?'[41] There are dragons with freedom not merely from gravity, but from this very world, should they so choose. The dragons of Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* series have the ability to freely leave the world and travel upon the 'The Other Wind', a different world, beyond where they currently reside. This gives the dragons an alien nature, as they are not wholly of this world or the other but may freely move between the two. The dragons from *Realms of the Gods* in comparison may pass between the Divine Realms of gods, the Mortal Realms of humans and the Dragon Lands freely without any problems and also carry passengers. 'You were brought here by lesser gods, not by dragons. You will not become ill in the least.'[42] This implies that dragons have a freer position in the cosmic order than gods. Indeed, when gods attempt to move others through worlds their travel is inexact and has a tendency to go awry, while dragons are free to arrive precisely where they wish. 'Sometimes those whom the gods return to other Realms – how shall I put it? – they go astray.'[43] This ability places the dragons outside of the gods' purview. They have the power to come and go as they will, with greater freedom than even deities. Such power also places a dragon outside of the control of gods, unlike humans who are subservient to a deity's whims.

'Then Ferro turned and…well, just vanished. No flicker of light, no puff of flame. Just gone.'[44] Much like Ferrovax's teleportation, other dragons have the capacity to travel wherever they wish without restriction. This means that a dragon cannot be simply imprisoned or limited in its movement. The dragons of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* have the power to 'go between' which enables them to travel to any place that the dragon's rider can envisage within 'the time it takes to

cough three times.'[45] This ability allows them to go wherever they wish to, across the world of Pern. To move wherever they please within a world gives dragons the enviable power of never being trapped; they can be gone at will and not live beholden to anyone. Together, these powers of movement ensure that the dragon is the embodiment of the human desire for freedom and escape. These desirable, unattainable attributes would increase a human's feelings of awe and possibly jealousy towards dragons.

Control of its body shows a dragon's mastery of self. When depicted as intelligent and magical, dragons are often revealed to have the ability to alter their physical form. This manifests in multiple ways, from the changing of colour to the alteration of physical appearance. This ability to change form can be both Othering and yet, when taking a form humans are comfortable with, less imposing.

Shape-shifting is a power that blurs lines. Within Chinese lore a dragon may alter its size as it chooses, and in the medieval British legend of *Lludd and Llefelys* shape-shifting dragons do battle across Britain. Within mythology, to be able to change one's shape is also indicative of a powerful will and sense of self. This is a common trait shared between both Eastern and Western narratives (although it is more popular in regard to *long* as opposed to true dragons). This is undoubtedly due to the highly magical nature of this ability and how it shows a connection between dragons and the world around them. Haku of *Spirited Away* is capable of assuming both forms though he is unable to speak while in dragon shape and he is noticeably wilder and acts more like an animal, lashing out when injured and growling at humans and spirits. This highlights the more bestial nature of his

dragon shape compared to his composed human form. Within *Earthsea* the dragon-people like Tehanu and Irian can assume the forms of dragons and humans at will, as they are both. This represents the duality of their identity being both of the humans and the dragons; it helps the two to act as intermediaries between the species in the series' final instalment *The Other Wind*. The ability to assume human form gives a dragon a greater sense of what it means to be human, at the same time reducing their 'Otherness' and allowing a greater sense of empathy towards mortals, explaining why dragons with the ability to assume human form are usually benevolent. This also raises the question of whether assuming the dragon's shape is the same as being a dragon? I would argue that the dragon is not solely their shape, but also the dragon's mind-set and nature. It is akin to dressing up a cat in human clothes and calling it a baby. The dragon's essence transcends physical shape.

Some dragons may also move unseen and intervene whenever they choose. The power of invisibility places the dragon into the area of the uncanny. Bennett and Royle posit that 'Invisibility … is the condition of racial otherness.'[46] We do not perceive this creature because he challenges our world view and an anthropocentric sense of superiority. This power is also odd and unnerving as this is a powerful, intelligent predator that may go where he wishes unnoticed. Sometimes this ability is not even as elaborate as true invisibility, for example Draco of *Dragonheart* is capable of camouflaging himself to look like a pile of rocks.[47] While commonly found among the *long* in Chinese folklore,[48] this power can also be found in virtually any magical dragon in modern fiction. The appeal of an enormous dragon, capable of moving unseen, adds to its mystique and explains why it is difficult for their enemies to locate. For example in *Realms of the Gods*

Diamondflame (a true dragon) is capable of passing unseen to avoid sending the populace of an allied city into a panic.[49]

The power of healing, however, is ultimately the most benevolent of all abilities. It shows a selflessness and empathy that is not normally associated with dragons in the West. While there are traditions in which dragon body parts have medicinal properties, this particular ability is where the dragon has the power to heal magically. In folklore, such as the story of the Lambton Worm, there are *lindorms* that can regenerate by pulling their pieces back together, which is also an example of a dragon's self-mastery. When a dragon has the power to heal others and actively does so, however, it is a definitive sign of that dragon's benevolence and having the best interests of others at heart. In Diana Wynne Jones' novel, *The Darklord of Derkholm*, despite Scales' aggressive personality and his claims that he is only acting so as to pay a debt, the dragon shows his true benevolence when he heals injuries of various characters, though he gruffly refers to it as 'encouraging nature.' [50] This is not a new phenomenon, as the old European folktale of the Dragon-maid speaks of a dragon-woman who would bless kind infertile couples with the ability to have children.[51] Dragons who can heal are perhaps the strongest counterpoint to using them simply for Magical Fodder; the ability to heal provides a non-threatening demeanour which is also beneficial to others. An ability of this nature places a greater value on respecting the dragon rather than denigrating or fearing it for being Other.

The Dragon's Use of Magic

Since dragons are the ultimate depiction *Of Faërie,* it is no surprise that they are capable of manipulating the essence of that realm as Magic. As previously

introduced in this chapter, this power comes in several forms, but in many stories, dragons do not simply use magic, they are magic. Dragons often possess the power to manipulate the actual force of magic and not merely use it as the source of their abilities. Dragons with these powers show that magic is an inherent part of them. Some instances involve dragons instinctively calling upon the magic as part of themselves; the magic is not laboriously bound in incantation or gesture but is a wilder and more primal power based upon instinct and emotion.

I will now posit a frightening scenario. You have a large reptile, capable of flight, breathing fire and in possession of great physical strength, how can it get worse? The dragon is also a magician. Here I interpret the 'dragons are magic' idea and push it further than mere magical abilities at the dragon's disposal. These dragons are not mere forces of magic, but can manipulate the force to achieve their own ends. They cast spells and use rituals and learn this magic like a wizard, only with the additional bonus of being a dragon. Hence they are wielders of the earlier mentioned Mortal Magic. The idea of dragons as practitioners of Mortal Magic is recent. They have often been the origin of various forms of Mortal Magic, but I have only encountered direct references to using mortal magic in recent works. This would therefore imply that authors who utilise this particular trope seek to narrow the divide between humans and dragons.

Perhaps the most well-known text possessing dragon magicians would be the fantasy table-top game and expanded product base of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Dragons within this game and its stories possess a natural connection to magic, but must learn and progress with their abilities in a similar fashion to a mortal magician. While their power is innate, it must still be studied and its use is not an

instinctive act. Despite this similarity to mortals' use of magic, the dragons, unlike humans, all learn magic and as they grow older they grow more powerful, with the Great Wyrms rivalling the most powerful magicians.

A similar situation is observed in *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*. The old dragon Scales is shown to be a very powerful magic user, like many of the elder dragons: 'Mum said some of the old [dragons] were quite good at magic.'[52] Despite this greater level of power, however, their use of magic is just like that of a human magician so in this regard, Scales' knowledge of magic is enough for him to advise others on its use. Dragons who are magicians are often the ones who fall into the stronger end of the magical power spectrum; they are no mere hedge witches or common conjurers. The dragon magician, if of a friendly disposition, is also the more likely dragon to mentor others. For example, Scales goes on to take a human and a griffin apprentice at the end of *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* after disparaging how they had been taught previously. These dragons are also less mysterious to a human as their magic is something that humans can acquire and learn. This makes the magic something that can be thought about and understood, rather than being a wild and untameable force.

The dragon magician, however, is not the variation that all authors consider when they interpret the dragon, his relationship with magic, and the powers of Faërie. Tolkien states in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories' that: 'Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic – but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the laborious, scientific, magician.'[53] This magic used by dragons also emerges in an instinctive form, where the dragons do not need to study and consciously think about their magic, they simply use it instinctively.

The dragons in Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* do not possess the logical, structured magic of their counterparts in *Dungeons and Dragons* or *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*. Instead these dragons have a wilder type of magic, which, apart from their fire breathing, they cannot control. Their power is not defined by thought or spells but is rather utilised through the subconscious mind and is activated by emotion and desire. 'Dragons' minds are different from ours; they need no protection from magic. They cannot use it consciously, aside from their fire, but when the gift touches them, their strength is unparalleled.'[54] These dragons cannot use magic as often, but can tap into it in a raw and more powerful state than mortal magicians, implying that they have a closer, yet less precise, connection than other beings. Even so, their magic can do things that the consciously considered and logical application of magic cannot, since it acts upon instinct rather than knowledge. The dragon Saphira can, without knowing any kind of process or design, transmute a stone block from rock to crystal. She is also able to place a magical mark that usually identifies dragon-riders upon someone's brow that acts as a kind of talisman. This is also the magic that can defy the laws and conventions of the structure placed upon magic with the language of magic. This concept further distinguishes the dragon's use of magic from that of humans. Malinowski writes that in human traditions:

> [M]agic is surrounded by strict conditions: exact remembrance of a spell, unimpeachable performance of a rite, unswerving adhesion to the taboos and observances which shackle the magician.[55]

Malinowski's anthropological study shows that when humans conceive magic it has to have restrictions upon how we manipulate it as a force and that there are certain requirements to access this power. Paolini's dragons do not have such

limits. This magic is not like human magic, it is the magic *Of Fairië*, beyond mortal comprehension.

The dragons of *Earthsea* are the physical embodiments in their world of what is magical. While wizards must study for years to gain enough knowledge to be considered proficient in the Old Speech, a dragon, once it reaches adulthood, knows the entire speech instinctively. In fact, the dragons are implied to be innately connected with Old Speech, the language of magic. The former arch mage Sparrowhawk states: 'My guess would be that the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being.'[56] Fully mature, adult dragons are indeed so powerful that only the greatest of wizards are considered capable of fighting them in open combat. The only way that the wizard Sparrowhawk can defeat the Dragon of Pendor is by commanding him via his true name. Additionally, some beings are born who are both dragon and human, thus they may change between forms at will, without worrying about losing their identity as a result of the change. Their transformation and speech is also instinctive, with the added ability of shape changing. So entwined are dragons with magic that the eldest of dragons, Kalessin, is able to perform acts of creation and is almost deific. The reader is given a hint at Kallessin's power in *Tehanu* where he is implied to be the demiurge Segoy, who raised the archipelago from the sea with magic in the ancient past.[57] Dragons are powerful enough to even travel beyond the world to another realm called 'The Other Wind', a place that is beyond any mortal scope or grasp.

These dragons, rather than being mere dragon magicians, can best be described as beings of enchantment. The magic is as much a part of them as they are of it.

While humans simply use magic, dragons are magic, just as much as they are Faërie. This depiction of dragons, rather than associating them more closely with humans, instead Others them further, placing them as physical embodiments of a force that humans do not and cannot understand.

Dragons also exist as what I refer to as 'fonts of magic.' They do not merely use the force, but are the active producers of it. Practitioners of magic can make use of a run-off that the dragons produce or else tap into the reserves of magical energy that the dragons possess. In this regard, the dragons are like living versions of the magic-enhancing ley lines and sacred sites proposed by occultists like John Michel.[58]

George R. R. Martin's dragons in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are portrayed in this fashion. The dragons are a crucial aspect to the setting. At the beginning of the series, dragons are extinct and magic is little more than parlour tricks performed by charlatans. This is, for the most part, thanks to the Doom of Valyria, a cataclysmic event that destroyed a powerful magical empire, and results in House Targaryen, a refugee house from Valyria, conquering the continent of Westeros with their dragons. After three hundred years, however, dragons died out, so their power and magic is gone. With the dragons gone, sorcerers and magicians suddenly find themselves reduced from men of power to tricksters and eccentric scholars: 'Perhaps magic was once a mighty force in the world, but no longer.'[59] This state of the world persists until Daenerys Targaryen, heir to her father's throne, hatches three baby dragons. Prior to the hatching of dragons, many of the fantastic things from the magical past are dismissed as legends and fiction; men who endeavour to bring back dragons through sorcery or superstitious use of the

world's equivalent to Greek fire and attempts at quickening fossilised eggs are considered madmen. 'The Targaryens tried to bring [dragons] back half a dozen times. And made fools of themselves, or corpses.'[60] This status quo is suddenly changed with Daenerys. These dragons begin a return of magic to the world; charlatans suddenly find themselves in possession of real power. Men such as the Pyromancer, the Warlocks of Qarth, and the Mage of the Maester's Citadel, all find themselves capable of the power which they had previously sought. A fire mage who previously relied upon trickery and pyrotechnics can now conjure flames at will.[61] The Mage is a mocking title given to a scholar who is an expert in the study of magic, yet is now a title that holds true. In addition to people now finding that they have power, there is a dragon-glass (obsidian) candle that has stood dead for more than a century which is now lit by the Mage of the Maester's Citadel.[62] The mere presence of dragons in the world causes a renewal of magic. This creates a world-altering effect and causes magicians, such as the Warlocks of Qarth, to desire possession of the dragons to maintain their previously lost power.

In Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* the dragons, in addition to being creatures of enchantment, are natural repositories of magic. When a dragon bonds with a rider, that rider becomes a magician and 'a dragon strengthens his rider's magic beyond what a normal magician might have.'[63] The dragon will also, due to his connection to its rider, grant the rider greater strength, agility and lifespan. 'All the Riders were stronger of body, keener of mind, and truer of sight than normal men.'[64] This is expanded on a species-wide scale by the magical pact made between dragons and elves, called the *Blood Oath*: 'Our magic, dragons' magic – which permeates every fiber of our being – was transmitted to the elves and, in time, gave them their much vaunted strength and grace.'[65] This was a

peace agreement that caused a character trait exchange between the two species, in addition to the power gained by the elves; the dragons became less bestial and more civilised. While Paolini's dragons possess a natural font of magic, unlike Martin's dragons, they are able to make ready use of it and it has some other additional effects on those around them.

The font of magic is one of the most world-changing effects of a dragon's connection to magic. By its mere presence it changes the world and the creatures around it. These dragons are so much a part of *Faërie* as they are its carriers. The emergence of the 'fonts of magic' idea in recent writing highlights a recurring theme. These dragons bring *Faërie* and the Perilous Realm wherever they go for they are the sources of the alien wonder and power that is magic.

Teachers of Magic

As mentioned previously, dragons can also become teachers of magic. In this case they become the origin for the Mortal Magic, the external force that provides this art with its 'traditional integrity.'[66] This concept has its roots at least as far back as a Chinese myth, in which a dragon emerged from the Yellow River and gave the elements of writing to Fu Hsi. There is also the *Yu Lung*, the dragon that exists as a model and representative of literary aspirants in Confucian exams. Therefore, this idea of dragons as teachers of magic draws from an old tradition. As dragons are fundamentally linked to magic, it is entirely understandable that they would be among the best teachers. The ability to pass on their knowledge has the potential to in turn make them far more understandable to a human than a creature who can neither explain nor share their knowledge with mere mortals. In this regard dragons may be considered a distinct culture that can provide knowledge

previously unknown to humanity, in much the same way that China passed the secrets of gunpowder to the world, revolutionising conflict and war, or the Greek Philosophers and their contribution to critical thought.

Within the animated television show *Avatar: The Last Airbender* the dragons are portrayed as the original practitioners of the magical martial art of firebending. [67] Humans learn this ability to 'bend' fire from the dragons. As a key part of firebending is the control and manipulation of one's own breath, so the dragons teach through breathing fire. This role of the dragon as a teacher is understandable because, as noted in Chapter 2, dragons are sometimes keepers of ancient knowledge, thus when they share this knowledge it is often through some form of lesson. The dragons' greatest lesson was that 'Fire is life, not just destruction.'[68] As the power that they are imparting is fire, it is simultaneously a reference to dragons as bringing innovation, technology, industry and even civilisation to mankind. With the idea of human industry and technology in mind as a result of their actions, the dragons of *Avatar* can be described as 'promethean.'[69] Much like Prometheus the dragons also suffer for their actions as later they find themselves on the receiving end of a near genocide by the humans of the Fire Nation, who pervert the dragons' teachings and begin to hunt the dragons for prestige. The dragons fundamentally changed how warfare could be waged by many humans and thanks to their techniques being perverted, it was their downfall. To discover the true way to firebend, the eponymous Avatar, Aang, along with his companion Zuko, learn from the last surviving dragons that are living in hiding.

In *The Darklord of Derkholm*, Scales also emphasises this teaching aspect in his interactions with the young griffin Kit and human boy Blade, whom he begins to

tutor in the arts of magic. Rather than out of a desire to improve humanity, like the dragons of *Avatar*, Scales' motives are more personal, as he sees how little of an education his students were previously given. In the same way that Plato or Socrates passed on their knowledge, Scales teaches to make sure that people have a proper education, focusing on the individual rather than imparting a new change upon a society.

The dragon mentor is almost exclusively a benevolent figure, as a dragon would need to be friendly before it allows a person access to its secrets. This idea is not without potential exceptions; it could be possible for a dragon to mentor a villain as easily it does a hero. The dragon as a teacher of magic is also a representation of humans in relation to dragons as a species. If dragons are depicted as an ancient culture with their own knowledge and developments, the emphasis is that humans should not discount what can be learned from the Other.

The Unmagical Dragon

While the common perception of dragons is that they are magical, a few fantasy texts posit the exact opposite scenario. In a form of transposition adaptation, where a text takes a major departure from its source, the unmagical dragon is a departure from the standard convention regarding post-nineteen thirties dragons. These are the dragons whose characteristics identified, not through magic, but through scientific explanation. It is interesting to note that in a very rational, science-oriented age it is the magical dragon that is more popular and prolific, while these unmagical dragons are the exception, not the rule. Unmagical dragons are quite limited in terms of their characteristics; for the most part they are merely

large reptiles who can breathe fire. Two modern fantasy writers—Terry Pratchett and Patrick Rothfuss—have created very distinctive unmagical dragons.

Rothfuss, in his novel *The Name of the Wind* presents the Draccus. It is distinctive as a non-magical dragon as it is a quadrupedal reptile that does not fly. This is unusual as other unmagical dragons (like Terry Pratchett's swamp dragons or dragons in texts where magic is not even mentioned, such as *How To Train Your Dragon*,) are capable of flight. The Draccus does breath fire, however this is only as a mating display. Like most dragons its scales are like iron, but are made from centuries of iron ore in its gizzard being worn down and processed through its body and used to reinforce its hide. The fire-breathing aspect of the creature comes from it breathing gas and igniting it with a spark like an electric eel. To further differentiate the Draccus from a magical dragon, it is shown to be a herbivore, rather than the standard interpretation of all dragons as carnivores. Simply because the dragon is scientific and non-magical, does not immediately mean that there is no magic within the world. Rothfuss' protagonist Kvothe is a magician who through the use of his magic, manages to kill a Draccus that has gone on a rampage. Yet, while Kvothe knows the Draccus to be simply a normal beast, the town that he saves could not believe that such a creature could be anything other than an evil agent of destruction, like a demon. Rothfuss plays upon the perception of folklore and deconstructs the myths of dragon-slayers, particularly the dragon-slaying saint, with a supposed victory over forces of darkness to be simply putting down a rabid beast.

Pratchett has two varieties of dragons in his novel *Guards! Guards!*, the Noble and the Swamp dragon. The Noble dragon is a creature that dwells in another

realm of existence; it maintains its unreal status by consumption of magic. This enables the enormous creature to fly despite its size and breathe fire in the manner that it does, as well as communicate telepathically. Due to its highly magical nature, to summon one from its realm the conjuror must sacrifice magical items. The dragon more or less feeds upon and absorbs magic, as when attacked by wizards, the dragon simply grows stronger. Even so, due to its high consumption of magic, where there is little of it, the Noble dragon cannot survive and so is transported back to its realm.

The Swamp dragon serves as a contrast to its hyper-magical counterpart; it is a decidedly unmagical and unthreatening dragon. The Swamp dragons are quite small and are bred as pets in the same way dogs are bred; there are even shelters for abandoned swamp dragons. Their fire-breathing is caused by eating anything containing the necessary chemicals for it to produce a reaction, causing flame. This flame is spouted as a display of dominance or for incubating eggs. These swamp dragons are also highly combustible due to the variety of chemicals needed for them for produce flame. Much like the Draccus, it is implied that the swamp dragons have gained a poor reputation and have been killed by men mistaking them for their more intimidating magical cousins. It is also notable that swamp dragons appear, in terms of size, roughly equivalent to dragons in pieces such as Edward Burne-Jones' painting of Saint George and the Dragon. Their reputation as powerful dragons is due to the evils of human fear, rather than actual malevolence.

Unmagical dragons exist to offer a contrast to magical forces or creatures; these creatures have no magic and rather than being the incarnation of all that is magical

and fantastic, they instead are animals caught up in a magical world. This status serves to highlight the idea of dragons as simple animals, that rather than creatures to be feared as agents of death and evil, they are another part of the ecosystem, like a tiger. This acts as a contrast to human villains who are generally the true villains. Thus, the unmagical dragon throws into relief the typical magical depiction; it looks at the dragons as simply animals. As previously discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to Sandra Unerman's meditations on the Nature of the Dragon,[70] this viewpoint reflects the modern perception towards animals and their treatment.

The relationship between dragons and magic is complex and takes various shapes and forms. It is not possible to simply state that dragons are magical, as their magic is expressed in a variety of ways. The magic could be represented by bodies that have magical properties or actual manipulation of the power of magic. Even then there are finer differences, such as whether the dragon's knowledge is accessible to mortals. A dragon's magical abilities, however, provide insight into the nature and capability of the dragon, particularly its elemental powers. What is indisputable is that the dragon's magical nature cements its status as Other and will orientate a text's genre towards fantasy, as our psyches are predisposed to associate dragons with the exotic realm of *Faërie*. Even the definitively non-magical varieties of dragons such as Terry Pratchett's Swamp dragons and Patrick Rothfuss' Draccus are only considered notable in their difference from their magical precursors. The modern dragon is a creature of mystery, a being '*Of Faërie*.'

Contemporary narratives depict magic in two ways. While maintaining tradition — with ideas such as primal elements or making use of magic by the transmission of knowledge — recent texts create what Linda Costanzo Cahir terms 'radical' adaptations[71] which take dragons and magic in new directions. By making dragons a source of magic, they become far more significant forces within their respective worlds, providing a tangible reason for magic. Other recent innovations such as the ice creates a counterpoint to the (now traditional) depiction of fire, creating a dichotomy where one can oppose the other. It also fills in a tangible gap in the elements, as dragons already have elemental affiliations with fire, lightning, water, air, and earth; ice is a logical expansion. Meanwhile the unmagical dragon allows for a complete rejection of magic and will enable a dragon to venture forth from his established domain of fantasy into other genres, expanding his powerbase.

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Chapter 4: Dragon-slayers and Dragon-riders

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> Dragonriders were men apart. Anger did not cloud their intelligence. Greed did not sully their judgement. Fear did not dull their reactions.[1]

The interactions between humans and dragons are the most revealing in our understanding and depiction of them. This chapter concerns itself with both the conflict and the co-operation between the two species. Initially I will discuss the ancient tradition of dragon-slaying and its modern equivalents, but will later progress into the recent literary convention of dragon-riding. Here, one of the core arguments of my thesis is profiled; on the one hand the recycling of the familiar and beloved tropes, and on the other a delight in the magical possibilities of reinvention. The field of human-animal studies provides an effective framework here as the power dynamics between dragon and human are not too dissimilar from those between human and animal. However, the work of Phillip Armstrong reveals that it is dangerous to assume that a dragon can be tamed and controlled, as it is in essence a creature of wildness.

'"Dragonslayer" is one of the most prestigious titles a hero may attain.'[2] For as long as there have been dragons, there have been those who would slay them. Dragon-slaying comes from a long literary tradition and has involved gods, saints, and even brave mortals. One of the earliest dragon-slayers was Marduk, the Babylonian storm god who slew Tiamat and from her body created the world.[3] Like Marduk's conflict with Tiamat, dragon-slaying within pagan Indo-European

cultures was often depicted as the triumph of law and divinity over the forces of primordial chaos and disorder.

Initially these dragon-slayings were regarded as necessary to stop chaos in order to bring order and life to the world. This pagan variety of dragon-slaying came to an end with the advent of Christianity. To the Church, dragons were evil forces of the old paganism, representatives of idolatry, and servants of the Devil or even the Devil himself. The slaying of a dragon to a medieval audience was regarded as a victory of righteousness over the forces of the devil and paganism, which to the Church would be the chaos of barbarism and wickedness outside of its control. A prominent hero from this period was Saint George, a figure who resonated with the Church and particularly with the English, who adopted him as their patron saint. Both Marduk and Saint George fit the pattern of the forces of the divine pitted against the dragon as the embodiment of either chaos or wickedness.

A third variety of slayer, in contrast, rarely has divinity on his or her side and must instead resort to the strength and ingenuity of mortal men. The codifier of this dragon-slayer archetype is Beowulf who, in his epic final battle, is a dragon-slayer who has neither the might of a god or the overwhelming power of a saint, but instead relies on his force of arms and experience in battle to confront a dragon. When a typical mortal fights a dragon the conflict is less about the lofty ideals of cosmic order or the balance between good and evil, and more about survival. The dragon and man are in conflict for their existence, each is a threat to the other. This greater level of ambiguity is reminiscent of Hegel's theory of primitive tragedy wherein 'both sides of the contradiction, if taken by themselves, are *justified*'.[4] The main reason why the slayer must venture forth is because the

dragon poses a threat to the people of an area and so, for human survival, must be stopped. The main common factor within all dragon-slayer stories, however, is that the dragon is a decidedly negative construct.

Tales of dragon-slaying are structured, indeed ritualistic, narratives. Jonathan D. Evans in his article 'Semiotics and Traditional in the Medieval Dragonslaying Tradition' categorises the components of the Germanic dragon-slaying tale using similar components to those laid down by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale*.[5] The story begins with the *preparation*, where the dragon-slayer must ready himself to travel out to do battle with his foe, be it gifting of a weapon or devising a strategy or receiving a blessing of some kind. The next component is *travel*: as discussed in Chapter 2 dragons live in isolated areas beyond civilisation. The next two components are intertwined, the *combat* and the *slaying* wherein the dragon-slayer will engage with his designated foe and after a time emerge victorious. The final stage of the story is the *reward*, where the hero acquires his gold, bride, lands, or whatever variation thereof.

> An optional slot appended to this segment includes the *dismemberment* of the dragon, when the hero beheads the dragon, cuts off its talons, or cuts out its tongue in order to take away some trophy from the dead dragon's body.[6]

Dismemberment is also where the Magic Fodder described in Chapter 3 can be taken from the dragon's body, such as Sigurd and his acquisition of Fafnir's heart. Despite Evans' comments about rewards for the dragon-slayer, his sequence is biased on behalf of the noble heroes. Heroes of humbler origins are less likely to receive such honour for their efforts. According to Jacqueline Simpson, in her study of the British dragon-slaying tradition, the working class hero is less likely

to be rewarded than his noble counterpart.[7] To the working class hero like a wood cutter, a shepherd, or a blacksmith, having slain a dragon is meant to be honour enough.

Evans further mentions that the time in his career when a dragon-slayer encounters a dragon is significant. A young hero fights a dragon at the beginning of his career to cement his status, which is where figures like the Orkney Islands folk-hero Assipattle fit.[8] More seasoned heroes battle dragons as a means to reinforce their status; a hero like Edmund Spencer's Red Cross Knight is one such dragon-slayer.[9] Heroes at the end of their career, like Beowulf, battle a dragon as a worthy final confrontation, as the ultimate challenge whose outcome will connect him with legendary or divine dragon-slayers like Thor, thus guaranteeing fame after death.

Dragon-slaying is not a safe or easy business; success in slaying the dragon does not diminish the mortality rate in dragon-slaying. As Simpson notes: 'It is not only heroes from among the common people who die these tragic deaths; several of the knightly heroes too are said to have died in the hour of victory, either from their wounds or from the horror of what they had done.'[10] In her study of 'Fifty British Dragon Tales'[11] seven of the heroes died as a result of their conflict, six from wounds, one killed by a treacherous servant. On either account, out of the forty-five stories that feature dragon-slaying, six of the would-be heroes died fighting a dragon, revealing a 13% mortality rate among successful dragon-slayers. This statistic shows that even with a victory there is no guarantee of survival in such a risky business.

The act of dragon-slaying comes in three major varieties: outright combat, invocation of divine power, and trickery. The outright combat can feature in any of the three aforementioned varieties, but it is by far the most common method of dragon-slaying when deities battle against primordial dragons. For example, the conflict between Zeus and the multiple-headed, draconic, monster-father, Titan Typhon was a conflict pitting Typhon's physical might against Zeus' lightning bolts. Zeus felled this dragon with little more than superior firepower.[12]

The defeat of a dragon through the invocation of a divine power can be achieved through combat, obliteration, or even taming/cowing the dragon into submission. Saint Martha's conflict with the Tarrasque is one such struggle. Rather than do battle with the dragon who was terrorising a town, Martha brandished her cross, placed her sash around its neck, sprinkled it with holy water and tamely led it into the village to be slaughtered.[13] This rather unsporting means of dragon-slaying is quite common in mythology and is particularly popular in stories of saints who invoke the power of God to achieve victory.

The third type of slaying, trickery, is most common with mortal dragon-slayers, particularly those of common birth, as opposed to the nobility. These acts of cunning and cleverness can range from getting the dragon to fight its own reflection, to shoving peat down its throat (usually a Scottish method), to the wearing of special armour. Sir John, in his conflict with the Lambton Worm (an exceptionally large *lindorm*) needed to protect himself from the dragon's constricting coils and powerful jaws.[14] To this end, he wore a suit of bladed armour. In every possible location there were knives and blades protruding from his armour so that when the beast attempted to kill him, it was cut to ribbons. This

use of cunning and cleverness is common in the folktales, compared to the loftier legends and myths. These are the methods of humans overcoming strength with cleverness, in a manner that is reminiscent of our dominance in nature, overcoming far more powerful creatures like tigers and bears through use of clever tactics.

Within modern fiction dragon-slayers occupy an ambiguous position. This is a departure from Evans' explanation of the medieval dragon tradition where '*human* and *hero* are seen as equivalent; likewise, *monster* and *villain* are correlated'.[15] Dragon-slayers no longer have the reputation as forces of pure good and divinity that they garnered from their Christianised interpretations. A contemporary dragon-slayer is undoubtedly a great warrior, but can occupy a more morally ambiguous position. The heroes of dragon-slaying tales are sometimes equally as savage as their enemies; the only reason why they are the hero is because they are human. With the changing attitudes towards dragons, as noted by Sandra Unerman and discussed in prior chapters, there is a shift in perception towards dragons being considered animals rather than monsters. As Phillip Armstrong states: 'The ways in which animals are understood and treated by humans must also be considered in relation to the ways we feel towards them.'[16] Hence, as we no longer consider dragons to be wholly evil, the dragon-slayer's privileged position is brought into question, as his species is no longer an indication of his morality. Unerman describes this shift as a 'change in attitude to humanity, which means that fictional evil is more convincing and more frightening when people, not dragons, are the true enemy'.[17]

Modern variations of the dragon-slayer narrative still conform to the components laid down by Evans. While this structure was initially developed as a method through which to analyse Germanic and Northern European folktales about dragon-slayers, I have noticed that it also has currency within a modern literary context and can be applied to text and film, demonstrating that the structure is an underlying pattern or deep trope within the narrative of dragon-slaying. Within some genres, however, this formula morphs certain aspects of the base narrative. In particular, young adult and children's fiction changes some of the variables where, in addition to exclusively featuring young heroes, the *travel* is shorter or the battle is less bloody and the *reward* might be different from the usual kingdom and princess, which is a reflection of the intended audience.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, follows Evans' structure, albeit changing the order. In place of *preparation*, the first component is *travel*, where Harry journeys deep underground to the eponymous chamber to rescue the 'fair maiden', Ginny Weasley. After the *travel*, comes the *preparation* where the Basilisk is blinded and Harry acquires a magic sword to battle the monster. Next is the *combat*, which, rather than utilising trickery appears to resort to outright fighting. Harry does not use any kind of special strategy apart from running around until he has to slay the beast. It is also a notable battle as it exists on a relatively small scale compared to the usual stakes involved with fighting a *lindorm*. In terms of battle this is on a small scale. The danger is contained to a school and localised to individuals. There are no settlements in danger of destruction, nor are livelihoods at stake. It is not a cataclysmic battle; in terms of conflict it appears to be more pest control, as the dangerous beast has previously

only hurt (not killed) and only two people (Harry and Ginny Weasley) are in direct danger.

The *slaying* is achieved by plunging the sword through the Basilisk's head, a typical choice of technique for a dragon-slayer using force as it is considered a mortal blow: 'Harry threw his whole weight behind the sword and drove it to the hilt into the roof of the serpent's mouth.'[18] The reader is shown the possibility that Harry could die, highlighting Simpson's point about not all dragon-slayers surviving. Harry, while inflicting the killing blow is stabbed by one of the Basilisk's fangs, injecting him with venom: 'He gripped the fang that was spreading poison through his body and wrenched out of his arm. But it was too late.'[19] It is only through the intervention of a phoenix that the young dragon-slayer survives. Harry then engages in *dismemberment*, using one of the Basilisk's fangs to destroy the cursed diary that has been the cause of the story's conflict. This allows Harry to finally achieve his *reward*, rescuing Ginny.

In addition to rescuing the maiden, Harry resolves the secondary plot of the cursed diary by later winning Dobby the elf's freedom from Lucius Malfoy, the villain who put the entire story into motion. The slaying of the dragon was not the sole aim of this quest, since this is a different genre from the typical heroic folktale or fantasy quest. It is not a medieval kingdom, but a magical boarding school, and consequently there needs to be a change for the dragon-slaying motifs to fit within the story's framework and with the primary target audience.

The film of *How to Train Your Dragon*, is another worthy example of the young dragon-slayer in fiction. I examine the film as it deviates to such an extent from

the novel that the two can be considered entirely different. Furthermore, the film has reached a wider audience than the lesser known novel. In contrast to Harry Potter, the film *How to Train Your Dragon* adheres to Evans' structure more closely, but it is more creative with its components. Hiccup's dragon-slaying weapons are not swords or bows, but more dragons. The young hero rides a dragon and in his *preparation* gathers an entire team of dragon-riders to support him. The *combat* of the film is also a major contrast to Harry and the Basilisk. The scale of the battle is epic, with hundreds of people in danger, including Hiccup's father Stoick and love interest Astrid. The foe, unlike the large snake Basilisk, is a colossal true dragon, able to fly, and capable of breathing great gouts of flame. Like Harry, however, Hiccup's method of *slaying* the Red Death also conforms to the dragon-slaying tradition. Hiccup achieves this by igniting the dragon from the inside by using his own dragon Toothless' plasma blast, similar to how Assipattle used burning peat to sear the liver of the Meister Stoor Worm. This is the last in a series of parallels to the Orkney folktale, as Assipattle also lived on a Viking island and battled an enormous dragon (albeit a sea dragon), grounding this story in cultural tradition. Even so, the use of fire to ignite the Red Death causes a more violent response than the Stoor Worm's death; Hiccup faces mortal peril from the explosive inferno of the dragon's death throes. Lastly, while Hiccup does survive the battle, some *dismemberment* takes place, but upon him rather than to the dragon. Hiccup could not be completely saved from the explosion; he is forever marked from the battle by the loss of his leg. Unlike Harry, Hiccup shows the deadly consequences that come from battling a dragon, he leaves the battle victorious but at a price, showing that even the noblest deeds can have consequences.

In contrast to the youthful heroes of more recent young adult and children's fiction who conform to Evans' structure, Bard the Bowman and Bilbo Baggins of *The Hobbit* can be considered more seasoned. They are definitely adult men (Bilbo is fifty, Bard appears to be in his thirties) and have proven themselves as competent fighters; Bilbo battled spiders, while Bard is a known guard of Laketown. Like *Harry Potter*, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* also has an unconventional approach to dragon-slaying. While the story follows the convention, it is not restricted to a single character, it is instead divided between two. The first half of the narrative structure is fulfilled by Bilbo, who in his *preparation* is persuaded by the wizard Gandalf to accompany a group of dwarves to the Lonely Mountain to help reclaim their stolen wealth from the dragon, Smaug: 'You asked me to find the fourteenth man for you expedition, and I chose Mr. Baggins.'[20] The *travel* segment is an extended piece which shows the process through which Bilbo becomes a seasoned adventurer by fighting goblins, besting the creature Gollum, slaying spiders, and escaping the Elf King's dungeons.

The *combat* is shared between the two characters. First Bilbo awakens and provokes Smaug, unintentionally causing the dragon to leave his lair to attack the settlement of Laketown. Here the dragon is met by the town's guards including Bard. The *slaying* comes about by Bard piercing Samug's weak point in his chest with the Black Arrow, finally killing the dragon who, in times past, had laid waste to an entire kingdom. The potential of the fight being mortal is not explicitly depicted, although Bard is the only man left defending the town and the Black Arrow is the last arrow in his quiver. Lastly, Bard and Bilbo equally share the final component of *reward*. Bilbo is showered with riches for his aid to the dwarves and Bard is able to at last reclaim his ancestral kingdom of Dale.

Yet, while all of these examples indicate that Tolkien conforms to conventions which he was likely quite aware of as a medieval scholar, he equally plays with the narrative. Sandra Unerman explains:

> Smaug is one of the most individual dragons in fiction; nevertheless, his basic function in the story is that of the traditional dragon, the evil enemy whose destruction brings about the happy ending. On the other hand, he is not killed by a hero fighting single-handed. He is shot by a bowman defending his town from attack, with the help of information provided by the hobbit. And the dragon's death does not remove all threats to peace or safety. The quarrels over his hoard lead to as much trouble and danger for the hobbit as Smaug did when he was alive. So the dragon is a traditional one but the world in which he lives is more complicated and there is less scope for straightforward heroism than in earlier tales.[21]

Unerman's comment places Tolkien more in line with later twentieth century authors who, while conforming to tradition, are more creative about the story's execution. This is understandable as Tolkien is foundation from where the modern dragon emerges, forming the link between tradition and innovation. Despite Unerman's description of him as an ordinary bowman, Bard can be seen as the saviour figure born from a heroic lineage, he just happens to be seen as an ordinary bowman. Much like Hiccup, Bard is a hero who goes out and saves a large number of people from a mighty dragon using ingenuity and cleverness.

These different examples emphasise that while the structure of the dragon-slayer narrative is still in use, it is not as straightforward or clear cut as it might be within older stories. While the folklore that influenced these stories was required to

conform to a stricter form, the nature of the components and the conflicts are liable to change in the much broader contemporary literary landscape. As adaptation theorist Julie Sanders notes the myths are 'continuously reworked across cultures and generations.'[22]

What is absent from modern narratives is the old dragon-slayer, as while there are allusions to death and mortality in battling a dragon, the authors or directors never follow through with the threat. This is likely due to the diminished power of a tragic figure in mainstream fantasy, as well as the type of genre which these dragon-slayers are depicted, such as young adult fiction. Few films or novels have dragon-slayers who are past their prime, which is likely why I have not encountered texts with an ending reminiscent of *Beowulf*. Elaborating on the absence of the old slayer's death, there is also a lack of mutual destruction at the hands of the slayer and dragon. The possibility is teased with, as shown through Hiccup and Harry Potter, but never realised. In these particular examples it is due to the young adult and children's literature genre which they occupy and generally do not allow the protagonist to be killed in his moment of triumph. Even in films for adults this particular reluctance to kill the protagonist is still in effect such as in *Dragonslayer* (1981) directed by Matther Robbins[23] and later in *Reign of Fire* (2002) directed by Rob Bowman,[24] in which the protagonist hero survives their battle. There is a need to assert that humans will not give in to their greatest enemy. The dragon is the ultimate challenge, for contemporary audiences, the idea that humanity is not equal to the challenge is a subject that is unimaginable.

In addition to the lack of mutual destruction or hero's death, there are some situations where the dragon is in fact not slain. One example is the World Eater Alduin in the videogame *Skyrim*. While most dragons would leave a corpse upon death, Alduin disappears by disintegrating into a cloud of flames, which can be interpreted as his slaying being a temporary stay from destruction and that he will in the end be resurrected to fulfil his destined role at the appropriate time. The absence of slaying occurs in a different fashion within *Dragonheart*, where the slayer befriends the dragon. Bowen, the seasoned dragon-slayer, initially perceived dragons as malevolent and targeted them in revenge for the actions of one who made a wicked prince immortal, but Bowen is reformed by Draco to be a hero and to recognise dragons as benevolent. The dragon and slayer find peace through moderation and discussion rather than violence. While the dragon is, in certain contexts, less of a villain, there is no true inversion of the dragon-slayer trope where a heroic dragon slays a villainous or antagonistic human. *Dragonheart* comes close, but in the end Draco redeems Bowen, rather than slaying him.

The dragon-slaying trope in contemporary fiction raises important questions of gender, especially as dragon-slayers are predominantly male, although female dragon-slayers are not unheard of. In addition to Christian Saints, such as Saint Martha and Saint Margaret, women battling dragons have existed in several ancient traditions. Examples from myth include the Chinese narrative of Nu Kwa, who slew a black dragon and used its body to seal a hole in the universe,[25] and the Hittie story of Inaras, who used trickery to capture and help slay one version of the dragon Illuyankas.[26] Despite having a discernible presence, these religious and mythological female dragon-slayers are not replicated in literary narratives, being

the exception rather than the rule in a male dominated arena. This paucity of female dragon-slayers has continued into contemporary literature as, of all the texts I have researched, only Jasper Fforde's novel *The Last Dragonslayer*, features such a character. Even here, despite being female and called a dragon-slayer, the titular dragon-slayer does not slay any dragons, and is instead simply given the title for political reasons. In regards to dragon-slaying this indicates a failure of gender views to progress, where even in a modern sentiment the idea of a woman engaging in violent activities is considered distasteful. Hence the greater representation in the more socially acceptable role of dragon-riding.

One additional shift in modern dragon-slaying narratives, is a greater emphasis on cunning as a means of defeating the dragon; fewer stories rely solely upon physical prowess or divine favour. Jacqueline Simpson remarks that 'one is both thrilled and amused to learn a new method by which the irresistible force of human ingenuity overcomes that immovable object, the dragon.'[27] The mortal dragon-slayer can be interpreted as a figure that tames a piece of wilderness and brings civilisation, a key part of the dragon-slayer's story is to travel into the wild and do battle with something that is anything but civilised. The mortal dragon-slayer uses critical thought and industry to overcome the raw power and majesty of nature.

Within *A Song of Ice and Fire* there are no modern dragon-slayers as, until the birth of Daenerys' dragons, the creatures were thought to be extinct. Yet Daenerys worries for her dragons' safety as men would kill helpless baby dragons for prestige. 'It was too dangerous to let them fly freely over the city, the world was all too full of men who would gladly kill them for no better reason than to name

themselves *dragonslayer*.'[28] This further highlights the significance of the title of dragon-slayer, that whatever world it exists within, the title carries weight. Within the backstory of the series, however, full grown dragons were mighty foes, capable of incinerating armies. While most would claim otherwise, the dragons were likely killed by trickery rather than force given the nature of the men who killed them. Brave men (like knights and warriors) are said to have killed the last of the dragons, but more learned characters reveal that a conspiracy of scholars were in fact behind the deaths. The Maesters of the Citadel, the setting's equivalent of a university, have secretly been trying to bring an end to magic, and part of this effort was the killing of the last dragons. 'The world the Citadel is building has no place in it for sorcery or prophecy or glass candles, much less for dragons.'[29]

The Vikings of *How to Train Your Dragon* have trained to fight dragons for decades and use a combination of trickery and brute force rather than simply one or the other. When he is first introduced, the Chief Stoick appears to fight dragons using little more than his strength and an axe. Later in the film though, it is revealed that all Vikings are trained in a variety of specific tactics for fighting dragons, such as making noise to disorientate, hiding in its blind spot, and knowing a how often a dragon can breathe fire. This strategy enables the Vikings to both show off their prodigious strength but also, when called for, exploit the dragons' weaknesses.

When it comes to the dragon-slayer narrative we can play with the story but in the end writers and directors usually choose to keep it in a firm structure with all of the traditional components. The appeal of a dragon as the hero fighting and killing

the wicked and dangerous humans is likely a situation that an audience would find too unnerving to watch. Hence there are no examples of a victorious dragon, particularly a victorious villainous dragon. Additionally there are also no slain heroes, nor are there female dragon-slayers. The deep trope of dragon-slaying narrative (especially in its modern incarnation) has conditioned readers to barely even consider these possibilities, let alone make them popular.

Dragon-riding

The tradition of dragon-slaying, despite being centuries to thousands of years old in story, is being supplanted in modern depictions of the medieval fantasy by a different narrative. Warriors no longer do battle with dragons; they now do battle upon dragons. As mentioned earlier, a dragon-rider gains their title through their association with dragons, but more specifically it is riding a dragon, in the same way that a knight would ride a horse, that confers this level of status. The idea of dragon riding has its origins in early Chinese myth with figures such as Yu and his companion the *Ying Lung* who would adventure together performing great deeds. Outside of the Orient there do not appear to be any other direct models of this tradition, although in Classical mythology the Roman Goddess Ceres rode in a chariot pulled by winged snakes.[30] *Avatar the Last Airbender* and its sequel series *The Legend of Korra* both feature dragon-riders who bring the concept back to its Oriental roots by having divine figures (such as Avatar Roku) or famed royalty such as Fire Lord Sozin and Fire Lord Zuko as the riders mounted upon winged *long*. They are examples of texts where, while there are dragon-riders, there is no dragon-rider narrative. This is not terribly unusual as there are also instances of dragons slain in fiction but no dragon-slayer narrative structure followed. Such instances are generally because these things are not core elements

of the story and can be removed but are included to add to a character's prestige. In terms of literary models, the dragon riding tradition appears to have its origins in the 1960s with Anne McCaffrey's novel *Dragonflight*, the first of her *Dragonriders of Pern* series. This is potentially a symptom of the increasingly globalised world, ease of travel, and greater cross cultural dialogue that emerged during this time period.

The idea of a hero fighting from a dragon's back —popularised by McCaffrey— has become prevalent in modern fiction, both in text and film. The aerial nature of a dragon places the rider above mere mortals, setting him or her as a hero apart from the standard convention. Interestingly, women are far more prevalent as dragon-riders than they are as dragon-slayers, as the gender gap is much narrower (particularly with protagonists). This is due to the more socially acceptable idea of a woman befriending a dragon than facing one in violent combat. Dragon-riding can even be symbolic of the right to lead or rule, drawing from the associations of dragons and leadership in Imperial Chinese and post-Roman British tradition. By taming the dragon, a hero is acknowledged as the having the right to rule. In certain circumstances, depending on the cultural background of the story, this particular right is also interpreted as divinely mandated. Within Chinese tradition and the belief in the *long* as a divine animal and some dragons, particularly *tien lung*, who serve as emissaries of the gods, this belief is not without merit. Additionally, since a dragon is power made manifest, by riding a dragon a hero proves his strength by being seated above the dragon, rather than besting them in combat he has 'broken it into saddle.' The dragon ridden in this way can be perceived solely as property or as an extension of J. M. Coetzee's idea that humans regard captive animals with contempt, and that they have been reduced to

slave populations.[31] This 'taming' of the dragon can also be examined as an Other being controlled and forced into following the rider's cultural customs and norms and having its own beliefs, such as hoarding treasure and considering non-dragons to be a free meal, suppressed (which many humans would find a relief). Where the hero's status would markedly increase by this relationship, does the dragon's decrease and become little more than an exotic form of horse? The texts that present a dragon and rider must be wary about whether there is a hierarchy between dragon and rider, what the nature of the partnership is, and if dragons are to be glorified mounts or characters in their own right.

Due to the recent emergence of the dragon-riding motif there is, unsurprisingly, little by way of critical material on the subject. What is apparent, however, in stories where dragon-riding is the core focus, the riders are all relatively young, being usually in the mid-teens to early twenties. This is likely due to dragonriders often being seen as against the norm and often innovative in their formation, hence the need to show young people as presenting these new ideas. As Hiccup, from the film *How to Train Your Dragon*, tells his companion Astrid: 'In all of history I'm the first Viking that wouldn't kill a dragon'[32] to which Astrid replies: 'First to ride one though.'[33]

By following the same process as Evans, I have devised a formula to which most of the dragon-rider narratives that I have researched conform. This formula operates on five key stages. The first stage is always the *encounter*, where the prospective rider first meets the dragon, be it at the dragon's hatching or in the wilds where the dragon is fully grown. Next is generally *observation*, where the rider learns about the dragon, coming to an understanding of it and its physical

capabilities. The third stage is typically *bonding*, wherein the prospective rider builds a rapport with the dragon, sometimes this is a mundane friendship, while in other situations it can be a mystical bond that develops and ties the two together. There is one situation where the positions of bond and observation are reversed which is when the bond is psychic, as opposed to friendship and trust. The penultimate stage is the *ride* where the rider and his or her dragon first take flight and the rider often has a change of perspective from the back of the dragon. Finally is the *reveal* where the dragon and rider are shown to be together in the wider world which often responds to their appearance with awe. The power dynamic between the dragon and rider is not static. At times it appears as if the rider is controlling the dragon as a mount, but as I will highlight later in the chapter this is not always the case.

An examination of Anne McCaffrey's first *Pern* novel *Dragonflight* highlights the accuracy of the formula. Lessa's *encounter* begins when she attends the hatching of her gold dragon, Ramoth. *Bonding* occurs at hatching when Ramoth and Lessa are mentally joined.

> A feeling of joy suffused Lessa; a feeling of warmth, tenderness, unalloyed affection, and instant respect and admiration flooded mind and soul. Never again would Lessa lack an advocate, a defender, an intimate, aware instantly of the temper of her mind and heart, of her desires.[34]

This is one of the specific instances where, due to a psychic link between dragon and rider, the bond occurs before the *observation*. This joining results in not only the rider and the dragon acquiring the ability to communicate telepathically, but also a sharing of emotions between the pair. Such a connection blurs the line between rider and dragon implying a symbiotic relationship. The *observation*

occurs during Lessa's caring for a young Ramoth, feeding her and learning about the young dragon as it grows to adulthood. At this stage in their relationship the power lies with the human as the dragon relies upon the rider to survive. The *observation*, in this instance, can be interpreted as a parent watching a child grow and the human partner learning about rearing and care, due to their role in the dragon's infancy..

The *ride* and *reveal* occur simultaneously when Lessa rides above the Weyr upon Ramoth's back in defiance of the patriarchal male riders who had previously informed her that gold dragons only fly to mate. 'The spectacle of the queen aloft had quite an effect on all beholders. F'lar was aware of its impact on himself and saw it reflected in the faces of the incredulous Holders, knew it from the way the dragons hummed, heard it from Mnementh.'[35] This act shows to Lessa, as well as the male dragon-riders, that she does not need to be constrained by their outdated traditions, nor will she be cowed into submission for disobeying their instructions. Arguably, a second *ride* can also be said to occur when Lessa uses the ability of the dragons to travel through time, when she travels back to her childhood and then returns to *reveal* the ability to the other riders.

The *encounter* in Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*, the first novel in his *Inheritance Cycle* is much like *Dragonflight*, It occurs when the mysterious stone that Eragon finds hatches into a baby dragon. This encounter with the dragon at infancy can give a parental dynamic to the dragon-human relationship, where the human partner is the guiding figure in the creature's life. 'Standing in front of him, licking off the membrane that encased it, was a dragon.'[36] Being at the hatching of his dragon, again, Eragon is in a position of power over the young dragon and is

the dominant figure in their relationship. Hatching is not the sole method of encounter in dragon-rider narratives, as encounters do not have to occur at hatching, they can even take place when the dragon is, arguably, fully grown. The film *How To Train Your Dragon* is one of the best examples of this variation. The *encounter* occurs when Hiccup refuses to kill the dragon who will later be named Toothless, and it shows that the two meet as equals rather than one asserting a place of dominance over the other at an early age.

Only by coming to understand the dragon is it possible for a character to actually bond with them. This is why *observation* is a key stage in the dragon-rider narrative. It is especially important for a bond that it is built upon trust and friendship as the duo do not have a psychic link to smooth over any misconceptions. In the film *How to Train Your Dragon* the *observation* is presented through Hiccup's drawing and note taking about the dragon in an attempt to understand it he also reads through the Viking Book of Dragons and asks the dragon-slaying mentor Gobber for information on dragons. For Eragon, the *observation*, in contrast, takes place with his feeding of the dragon Saphira and his attempts to know more about dragons, where he questions the storyteller Brom: 'How big were the dragons?'[37] 'When did they mature?'[38] Did dragons live very long?'[39] Eragon's questions show that even linked riders need to spend time observing and understanding their dragons, particularly when they meet their dragons as hatchlings. The *observation* does not need to be direct observation, but can also include research and fact finding to aid the rider in understanding their dragon.

For a human and a dragon to work together requires an explicit *bond* between the two. This bond will occur at the beginning of the relationship between the two characters and involves the pair becoming linked in a manner that will allow them to operate as a cohesive unit. This bond manifests differently in texts from the magical to the mundane, and while generally a positive thing can have significant ramifications.

McCaffrey and Paolini both show this connection through creating a deliberate telepathic link between the rider and dragon. Through their link, the pair can share their thoughts and emotions, as well as to simply communicate. McCaffrey, as discussed earlier, reveals this bond as a type of telepathy that enables communication between the dragon and rider. Paolini has a more mystical dimension to this bond. As was noted briefly in Chapter 3, the bond between dragon and rider also transforms the rider, as he or she becomes affected by the dragon as a magical entity. Eragon first notices this ability when his dragon is a hatchling: 'Something brushed against his consciousness, like a finger trailing over his skin.'[40] This involves a change, with the rider gaining magic, having the ability to speak telepathically and possess magically enhanced strength, speed and grace. This link shows that the consequences of the bond with a dragon is that while a rider has power, they have changed so much that their humanity can potentially be called into question. In Paolini's second book this has happened to Eragon: 'Please excuse my impertinence, sir, for I am ignorant of the ways of Riders, but are you not human? I was told you were.'[41]

How to Train Your Dragon has a more subtle bond than telepathy. The *bonding* takes place when Hiccup shares food, and earns the dragon's trust through his

attempts to get the crippled dragon to fly again. Instead, the connection is one built upon domestication, training, and a mutual trust. The dragons are trained to work with their riders and work as friends, rather than as something that has become an extension of the other's conscience. The bond between Hiccup and Toothless is an especially good example of this cooperation. In *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, in an attempt to better understand his dragon, Hiccup constructs a flight suit so the pair can glide together. By operating on trust, the two are not explicitly linked, but they are so close that, in the sequel film, Hiccup can break the mind control of an Alpha Dragon over Toothless: 'This is what it is to earn a dragon's loyalty.'[42]

The link is a great asset to the dragon and rider, however when it is as intimate as a psychic connection, it is also hazardous. When severed by the death of either rider or dragon, this link can cause depression and even the death of the surviving partner from the trauma of the split. The character Brom is one of the few dragon-riders to survive the shock of his dragon's death in *Eragon*. 'The pain is shock enough – although it isn't always a factor – but what really causes the damage is feeling part of your mind, part of your identity, die.'[43] Even though Brom is still a skilled warrior and magician, he is still bitter and affected by the loss of his dragon, driven by a need for vengeance against those responsible for her death. Within *Pern*, Lytol is another example of a character affected by the loss of his dragon. The man is routinely depicted as gloomy and miserable, unable to stand living among the dragon-riders anymore, dedicating himself to being a weaver and later the Warder to a Lord Holder instead. 'Occasionally a dragonless man remained living, such as Lytol, Ruatha's Warder, but he was half shadow and that indistinct self-lived in torment.'[44]

For the dragon, however, this link, once severed, almost always results in death, either by shock or suicide. The dragons of *Pern* almost all commit suicide on the death of their riders. *Inheritance Cycle* dragons, without fail, die from the shock of their rider's death, except in situations where their soul enters an *eldunari* (previously mentioned in Chapter 3). Regardless of how the *bond* manifests in dragon and rider, it is crucial for the pair to operate as without a legitimate bond the hero cannot be called a dragon-rider, they are instead just a person who rides a dragon.

Taking flight from a dragon's back is the ultimate expression of the bond between the dragon and the rider. Their first flight or *ride* is treated as an important and defining moment for the characters. As mentioned previously, the *ride* causes a change in perspective for characters and can be treated as a rite of passage; they journey into a different world, arguably (considering the age of most riders in these narratives) that of adulthood. The *ride* occurs in *How To Train Your Dragon* when the artificial tail fin crafted by Hiccup allows him to work together with Toothless to fly. This ride also shows that the pair can only fly together, affirming the closeness of their bond. This connection is further deepened by the end of the first film where Hiccup and Toothless share the symmetry of two disabled characters who, working together, can fly. The *ride* for Eragon occurs when he has to flee his home after creatures hunting for him burn down his house. Saphira makes him climb atop her back and they fly as far as she can carry him. 'Eragon yelled as the ground dropped away and they rose above the trees. Turbulence buffeted him, snatching the breath out of his mouth.'[45] This flight is not the epiphany of wonder that is seen with Hiccup and Lessa, but a harsh and brutal

awakening to the dangerous realities of the world in which Eragon now lives. Saphira's protective nature in this flight also reveals the degree of the bond between rider and dragon, showing a shift in the relationship from Eragon as Saphira's carer to the two becoming equals. 'You would not have been alive if we had stayed.'[46] Saphira shows that she is no longer dependent upon Erago for food or shelter. Now both dragon and rider contribute to their relationship, also she's now too big for him to boss around.

The *reveal* is perhaps the least necessary component of the dragon-rider narrative. It is, however, the component that shows the dragon-rider's status compared to regular society and shows how he or she has become set apart. The *reveal* of *How to Train Your Dragon* occurs when Hiccup, upon the back of Toothless, shows to the Vikings what a dragon and human in cooperation are truly capable of by slaying the monstrous Red Death. This *reveal* not only shows the solution to the long-standing conflict that has gripped the humans and dragons, but also Hiccup's worthiness as a ruler and future chief of his tribe. For *Eragon* the reveal does not truly occur until he arrives at the rebel stronghold of Tronjheim and is seen and acknowledged as a dragon-rider by the resistance to the Empire. For the majority of the book, Eragon has had to hide the fact that he is a rider and slowly learn what it means. By making his identity and status public knowledge, he discovers his new-found place within the world as a powerful figure who ostensibly holds a position beyond even lords, kings, and emperors. He now finds himself as a key member of war councils and a figure who is respected and even revered by the common folk: 'despite your protests, the people here have certain expectations of you. They are going to bring you their problems, no matter how petty, and demand that you solve them.'[47] This is especially apparent after his defeat of the

Shade, Durzha, wherein Eragon gains the title of Shadeslayer after he and Saphira work together to destroy the evil sorcerer.

George R.R. Martin's currently incomplete series *A Song of Ice and Fire* provides an example of the dragon-rider narrative structure in progress but not yet complete. Within *A Song of Ice and Fire* dragon-riders existed in the past, and over the course of four books a dragon-rider narrative is slowly taking place. The *encounter* occurs at the end of *A Game of Thrones* with the hatching of Daenerys Targaryen's dragon eggs:

> As Daenerys Targaryen rose to her feet, her black [dragon] *hissed*, pale smoke venting from its mouth and nostrils. The other two pulled away from her breats and added their voices to the call, translucent wings unfolding and stirring the air, and for the first time in hundreds of years, the night came alive with the music of dragons.[48]

The connection between the dragons at her breasts give the impression of Daenerys as a maternal figure towards these dragons, their encounter is the act of her now possessing three children, in the aftermath of her miscarriage. The particular phrasing 'music of dragons' also brings to mind that this is a momentous occasion which may have some spiritual significance, foreshadowing the later revelation that Daenerys is a figure of prophecy, the fabled 'Prince that was Promised'.[49] Of all of the *encounters* with dragon-riders that I have studied, this is the most compelling and memorable. The *observation* and *bonding* are somewhat tame compared to the *encounter* and take place over the course of *A Clash of Kings*, with Daenerys noting the colours and temperaments of her dragons, particularly her closeness to the black dragon Drogon, which comes to a peak when they must escape the Warlock's of Qarth.

The ride finally occurs in *A Dance with Dragons*, when Daenerys flies on Drogon's back out of the gladiator pits that he has just destroyed: 'The air was thick with sand. Dany could not see, she could not breathe, she could not think. The black wings cracked like thunder, and suddenly scarlet sands were beneath her.'[50] This freeing from the dust and sand also liberates Daenerys from the stagnating place in her life, where she had halted her march towards Westeros and her rightful throne to try to bring peace to Slaver's Bay. Her ride is a moment of clarity, enabling her to realise her position as a Targaryen, revealing what she should do and how she should act. *A Song of Ice and Fire* does not yet have an example of the *reveal*, however, judging by the course of the narrative, this series will follow the pattern that I have noted. This reveal will undoubtedly show her arrival in a populated area and cause many to submit to her as a figure who is not only 'The Mother of Dragons', but also the rider of a dragon and true heir to her dynasty. This is also a clue that Daenerys may emerge as the ultimate victor in the 'game of thrones'.

While dragons (and riders) are usually depicted in a heroic light, there is a darker aspect to human relationships with dragons. Dragons are essentially the fantasy equivalent of biological super weapons; they are capable of destroying armies and melting the strongest castles. This particular concept has been reused multiple times, but like many ideas related to dragons, likely has its origins in Tolkien's *Middle Earth* legendarium in which the dragons were bred as servants of the Great Enemy and original Dark Lord, Morgoth. This use for dragons is exemplified in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, with the Targaryen dynasty, and, by extension, their forebears of Old Valyria using dragons as weapons of conquest.

When utilised for conquest, a dragon-rider can be a powerful destructive force. Within *A Song of Ice and Fire* the dragon-riding lords, the Targaryens, are no more heroic than the next person. Their dragons are not used for defeating a dire threat or overthrowing tyranny or even to show interspecies co-operation. Their dragons are beasts of conquest. Dragons are described as being 'worth more than any army',[51] and the effects of the dragons of the past are shown in the television adaptation of the novels with Harrenhall, an enormous castle that was almost impregnable to a ground assault, melted to ruin by Balerion's fire when Aegon Targaryen took control of the lands of Westeros.[52] In a medieval world, a dragon offers aerial supremacy and can breathe fire down upon great swathes of foes. Aegon the Conqueror took over all of Westeros with three dragons and a comparatively tiny army. This leads to the world wide panic when, after centuries of extinction, new dragons are hatched.

This destruction is not by any means the only use for dragons in warfare. As mentioned, dragon-riders are generally depicted as heroic and in this particular context they can make use of the dragons' abilities as peace keepers. The Riders of the *Inheritance Cycle*, rather pointedly, use the dragons as a means to set up a powerful force for preventing war rather than enabling it. Until they are destroyed from within, they formed an enduring and stable set of kingdoms. A similar situation is evident within the film universe of *How to Train Your Dragon* as, by the second film, Berk uses dragons for defence to maintain the security and prosperity of their homes. The dragons' abilities in combat are also demonstrated against a conventional army where the Riders of Berk utterly dominate the forces

of Drago Bludvist until he slays the Alpha Bewilderbeast. Dragons, regardless of their level of power rewrite the rules of warfare.

Contemporary literature has expanded and creatively adapted the once, quite static form of story-telling that is dragon-slaying. This is necessary for the type of narrative to survive in a changing literary landscape, particularly given recent shifts in perspective towards dragons. The dragon-slaying trope is likely to continue to have a place in literature, as it has shown over the millennia to be a durable archetype. However, perceptions of dragons are not as fixed as they once were. The dragon-riding phenomenon became popular in a current climate of changing views towards dragons, reflecting the human-animal studies' trend of downplaying the monstrous other and highlighting the points of connection between people and other animals.

This sentiment is reinforced by Sandra Unerman's recurring comments about the changing attitudes towards dangerous animals, which are no longer regarded as reflections of morality, but instead as creatures that live in a different fashion. Unerman contends that to encounter true evil, humans must look at themselves. Dragons are now often perceived as animals that can be tamed rather than monsters to be slain. Then comes the greater preference for depicting dragons in the Tolkienian fashion of intelligent, powerful creatures, with whom communication is possible. This type of story has changed the face of fantasy work, as now there can be warriors fighting upon dragons and this diminishes the significance of the dragons as separate and Other. If there are characters who spend a significant amount of time alongside these creatures, they cannot be termed as creatures of mystery and faerie, particularly if they meekly allow a

mortal to learn their secrets and utilise them like a glorified horse. Honegger writes:

> Tolkien's dragons, although 'round characters', were never allowed to occupy as much narrative ground as their human(oid) counterparts, though they often got very close to doing so. The situation is different in works such as Eragon and McCaffrey's Dragons of Pern books where dragons are central protagonists who take up considerable narrative space, so that the readers get to know them very intimately. The fascination of the unknown, threatening and somewhat uncanny gives way to the fascination of the exotic; and albeit familiarity does not necessarily breed contempt, it certainly de-mythologizes the dragons and takes them down a notch or two. Saphira, the dragons of Pern…lose the power to 'enchant' the reader.[53]

The dragon-rider does, however, serve as a bridge between the worlds of dragon and human, erasing many of the distinctions and enabling a greater understanding between the two. In certain appearances this does imply a level of domestication with the dragon. When a man is seated atop a creature and it carries him, regardless of that creature's intelligence, it conveys an air of dominance.

A question that arises from the dragon and rider partnership is: what is the nature of the relationship? Is the dragon a domesticated beast or an equal partner? Additionally, does this mean that the rider has mastery over the dragon? The relationship cannot exclusively be seen as that between a knight and horse. The dragon is (usually) intelligent, larger and much more powerful than any other kind of mount. Part of how the relationship is defined depends upon the dragon's depiction within the text. If the dragon is not properly characterised, then it can

appear as little more than a glorified horse, or flying super weapon with wings serving a human master, such as some of the dragons in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. When the dragon is properly characterised, such as in *Eragon* or *How to Train Your Dragon* the partnership is one of equals.

Armstrong notes: 'As the history of modernity shows, however, attempts to eradicate, regulate, commodify or otherwise manipulate wildness tends to result in ferity – the return of wildness or an escape back to it, or its redirection into unexpected modes.'[54] While dragon-riders may fight upon their backs, can dragons ever be said to be truly tamed and domesticated? These are not comparatively small horses who can be broken into saddle. The dragon is an ancient reptile with enormous amounts of power at their disposal; to tame such a thing is a daunting task. McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* provides one such example during the dragon's hatching. The babies, in search of their destined companion pay no heed to anyone who gets in their way and maim or even kill out of ignorance and a desire to find their companion: 'Before Lessa could blink, it shook the first girl with such violence that her head snapped audibly and she fell limply to the sand.'[55] The sequel *Dragonquest* also shows that female dragons will attempt to kill one another if one interrupts another's mating flight, regardless of the danger that it poses to their riders.[56] Lastly, in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the young dragon, Drogon, despite being raised by a human, Daenerys Targaryen, is still a dragon and, in this setting, has the mind and muteness of an animal. This leads to him being unable to distinguish between people and other animals. With the exception of his adopted mother Daenerys, to Drogon they are all food. This is particularly apparent when he kills and eats a

young child, and then later arrives at an arena and devours both the gladiator and the wild boar she was fighting.

The power of a dragon has its appeal, but as noted in *Game of Thrones*, the television adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, 'They are dragons … they cannot be tamed.' Although the narratives featuring dragon-riding may thus appear to create a paradigm of domesticated dragon and controlling rider, this is perpetually undercut and complicated. Even in these texts the dragons remain a symbol of what Armstrong terms 'the wildness'.

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Chapter 5: Dragons, Gender, and Sexuality

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> So the dragon is subversion, revolution, change – a going beyond the old order in which men were taught to own and dominate and women were taught to collude with them: the order of oppression. It is the wisdom of the spirit and of the earth, uprising against misrule.
>
> And it rejects gender.[1]

When I embarked upon this research, a colleague asked me an innocuous question: 'How do you tell the difference between boy dragons and girl dragons?' The discussion that followed led to the realisation that, barring occasional use of gender signalling in terms of colour or size, dragons lack sexual dimorphism. I realised that I had again encountered another under-examined area of dragon-lore in need of critical analysis and investigation, so I began retracing the source material of myths and legends. I soon realised that dragons have always had an ambiguous status when it comes to gender. Are they masculine or feminine? Are they both or neither?

Dragons and serpents often influence one another in terms of symbolism. In terms of gender, the serpent is polyvalent. J. C. Cooper writes: 'It embodies all potentialities, both material and physical; it is masculine and phallic 'the husband of all women' but accompanies the Great Mother deities as intuitional wisdom, the secret and enigmatic.'[2] This serpent symbology can also be applied to the dragon. Traditionally the dragon has predominantly been depicted as a very

masculine force. Within the East it is said that: 'Dragons are of fire and air, the two elements considered masculine or Yang.'[3] The West also typically shows the dragon as a male figure (barring exceptions, such as the curse which created the Laidley Worm). The dragon traditions in both regions feature maiden sacrifice, wealth and power; all characteristics that are traditionally considered masculine. Despite the ingrained bias, this premise is comparatively recent, as dragons have had female variations since ancient Babylonia, such as the she-dragon Tiamat, and the dragons that pulled the chariot of Ceres in classical mythology.

Regardless of traditional variations, the default representation of a dragon in fiction is male. Smaug, arguably the most significant dragon at present, is always treated as male, and yet there is no query as to whether Smaug had a mother or if dragons are born in the conventional reptilian sense of a male and female dragon mating and laying eggs. Mortal heroes typically do battle against the loathsome beasts, and rarely does the story mention if the dragon is a parent or mated. The most significant example in literary form that I have encountered is *The Wizard of Earthsea*, where the Dragon of Pendor dwells with his offspring 'spawned there years ago by a she-dragon of the West Reach, who had set her clutch of great leathern eggs…and had flown away again, leaving the Old Dragon of Pendor to watch the young when they crawled like baneful lizards from the shell.'[4] The concept that dragons even have a gender is rarely addressed and, even then, is rarely given attention by either creative writers or critics.

This chapter will look at the rejection of gender in terms of how dragons are frequently depicted by contemporary writers. This is a subversion of not only the folklore roots, but also the dominant Tolkienian mould of the masculine dragon.

Yet the possibility of female dragons is not the sole issue of gender relating to dragons. Gender theorist Judith Butler, in her comments on women, also raises an important issue about gender:

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.[5]

Butler's writing is also applicable to the dragon, as perhaps it, as noted in the epigraph to this chapter, 'rejects gender' and human attempts to classify it are thus futile. Using this theory as a tool of analysis reveals that modern adaptations once again conform to what John Desmond and Peter Hawkes term a 'point of departure'[6] from the masculinised dragon and the rarer female dragon. It reveals that dragons can also be androgynous or even genderless, rejecting the human constructs of gender as they are not human.

This chapter will also look at the link between dragons and women. Once again, the ideas about the dichotomy of the wildness and civilisation discussed by Phillip Armstrong and applied to my analysis of dragon-slayers and dragon-riders in the previous chapter are applicable. Dragons are not alone on the edges of civilisation. Ursula K. LeGuin comments that women are pushed to the fringes of society, which gives them common ground with the dragon. Feminist theorists such as Butler and Rita Felski provide a logical tool through which to analyse these ideas.

Lastly the chapter will explore what a close relationship with a dragon reveals about human sexuality. This relates to both the way in which dragons can affect human sexual impulses for one another and to interspecies relationships between human and dragon, and the issue of such liaisons. These relationships bring my work back to discussions of the Other and how society has a tendency to exoticise and eroticise it. It also provides a standpoint from which to examine fears of miscegenation when human-dragon relationships bear issue.

Reptiles predominantly reproduce via sexual intercourse which occurs between males and females of the species. Logically, dragons as reptilian would be similar. There is one piece of evidence that shakes this assumption: dragons are also creatures of magic so standard laws of reproduction may not apply. Some dragons, such as *long* and *lindorm* appear to have been a type of ascended serpent; the serpent has transformed into a dragon either through enlightenment (*long*) or through some supernatural means and excessive eating (*lindorm*). Other dragons have been born in highly supernatural ways, for instance there is a story about a dragon that was born from a pile of corpses[7] and narratives of dragons created as a result of a person being cursed.[8] In yet more stories the dragon has no origin, they have simply emerged fully formed, such as dragon deities or the demonic variations of dragons that have entered the mortal world from hell. A dragon as a creature of magic does not always have an origin that conforms to natural laws. This reinforces the uncanny and mysterious state of a dragon; the closer that dragons are to enchantment, the less understandable they become. Whether the dragon is a threat or not is difficult to ascertain, as humans not understanding the creature might be more inclined to leave it alone (especially if the dragon's birth is a result of rare magical events). If humans understand how dragons reproduce,

then they would be more inclined to halt the process to ensure their species' own survival.

Within contemporary literature portraying a dragon as female is treated as unexpected and signal as a feature of the adaptation of the dragon. This is a 'point of departure' from the canonical fusion of the masculine and the dragon, which is a reconnection with earlier lost narratives depicting female dragons. In such stories, the text will depict the stereotypical dragon, but then reveals in a surprise twist that the marauding beast is actually female. This emerges in one of two ways, both of which are revealing of the way in which we view and construct gender. The first is that the dragon is simply biologically female, for example, the Noble Dragon from Pratchett's *Guards! Guards!*. This dragon — who has told the people of the city that 'They will increase my hoard'[9] and demanded a tribute of 'the finest flower of womanhood'[10] — is revealed to be 'a member of the female gender'.[11] The deliberate applications of 'masculine' attributes only to overturn them, presents the dragon as a deliberate challenge to gender stereotypes. The second variation is where the dragon shows distinctly feminine characteristics, for example the gender of the dragon from *Shrek* is revealed when she succumbs to the talking donkey's flattery: 'I mean of course you're a girl dragon, you're just reeking of feminine beauty.'[12] This example provides a different interpretation of female dragons, that, regardless of species, an intelligent creature is not masculine by default. These examples also work to highlight the social construction of gender as assumptions are made about the masculinity or femininity of a dragon based on long-standing human perceptions of the active male and the passive female. In *Of Queen's Gardens* John Ruskin famously challenged perceptions of gender superiority by asserting that men and women have 'separate characters':

'The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer … his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest … But the woman's … great function is Praise … By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.'[13] Authors who conceal and then reveal the gender of a dragon are essentially playing with these stereotypes and, in so doing, confront readers with their own assumptions about gender.

Recent texts have proven, however, that gender can be rejected entirely. Dragons can be subversive in all forms, not solely through a 'feminine reveal.' Within *Earthsea* Ursula K. LeGuin's dragons exist upon a gender continuum. The first three books show the Dragon of Pendor who is is predatory and greedy creature that hoards wealth, and Orm Embar the active and strong figure who, while noble, will attempt to fix a complex situation with force; these are masculine dragons who favour displays of strength and confrontation. The dragons who hold prominence at the end of the series are the females Tehanu and Orm Irian who favour mediation and negotiation rather than outright conflict, also seeking peaceful resolution to the differences between the two worlds. Their roles could typically be considered a reinforcement of gendered perceptions, yet Irian has shown herself to also be decisive in the short-story 'Dragonfly' from LeGuin's *Tales of Earthsea* where she destroys the oppressive wizard who returns from death. This action shows Irian to be just as powerful and decisive as her kinsman Orm Embar. Rawls writes that 'In making her dragons also women in the last three books, LeGuin upsets the expectations and conventions of the first three books, wherein mages who are always male, and male dragons are the most powerful creatures in Earthsea.'[14] Butler says that it is impossible to 'separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably

produced and maintained.'[15] So, what LeGuin provides instead is a comparison with figures that provide a counter to pre-conceived notions within the setting regarding gender particularly about what can be considered masculine and feminine. Instead of separating these ideas, the dragons act as a dissenting voice towards humanity's faults.

Balancing the two variations is the ambiguously gendered eldest dragon Kalessin, a mysterious figure who is referred to with the gender neutral pronoun of 'it.' Kalessin is also implied to be a demi-urge, and therefore may be a creature beyond gender entirely, who exists in an androgynous state much like an angel. LeGuin herself reveals that 'There were male and female dragons in the earlier books, but I don't know if Kalessin, the Eldest, is male or female or both or something else.'[16] LeGuin's approach to dragons allows her to upset ideas of oppression: 'The deepest foundation of the order of oppression is gendering, which names the male normal, dominant, active, and the female other, subject, passive.'[17] For LeGuin, dragons upset these traditional orders and are a force for change, they are a species that are figures of ultimate freedom. Hence dragons are also free from the constraints that humans adhere towards. 'To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths of race, have to be exploded and discarded.'[18]

George R. R. Martin provides an explanation for why dragons do not appear in mated pairs and their lack of sexual dimorphism. Within *A Song of Ice and Fire* the dragons are neither male nor female and reproduce, like female komodo dragons are sometimes known to do in the absence of a mate, via parthenogenesis. Martin solves the issue of gender with dragons by making them neither. This

ambiguity affects how the dragon-influenced dynasty, the Targaryens, interpret their prophecy regarding 'The Prince that Was Promised' which, despite translations claiming the Prince to be Rhaegar or Stannis, is implied to be Daenerys, as the prophecy refers to the 'Prince' as a dragon, which is a gender neutral term.

The androgynous nature of figures such as Kalessin and the dragons of *A Song of Ice and Fire* places them in a category where they might be compared to angels. Through this Biblical association, the androgynous quality could be symptomatic of the divine, giving rise to a greater degree of mystery and awe. This would also correlate with the Eastern idea of the dragon as a 'divine' animal. By considering the dragon in terms of divinity and immortality they do not need to reproduce, hence sexuality and reproduction can be an alien concept to them. The concept of the divine androgynous or even asexual dragon can also be found within *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* where dragons are eternal, have no point of birth and are, for regular mortals, impossible to permanently kill. These creatures have no sex or gender as they do not reproduce and are considered to embody aspects of the world's chief divinity, Akatosh the dragon-god of time. When a dragon is revealed as a form of divine entity, human ideas and concerns about biological sex are perhaps unnecessary to an immortal creature that does not need to reproduce.

These concepts of androgyny raise the question of whether or not gendered ideas should even be applied towards dragons. As mentioned earlier, Butler states that what humans consider to be characteristics of gender are social constructs. The subject is murky enough when applied towards different cultures, but in fiction there is the issue of applying such human preconceptions to something that has

been categorically stated to be non-human. In some of the contemporary depictions of dragons, particularly those penned by LeGuin, there is a conscious effort to use the medium of fantasy and the androgynous figure of the dragon to challenge perceptions of gender. Even when the intention is not as deliberate — as in Martin's series — the effect is similar: the transgendered otherness of the dragon unsettles but also potentially allows readers to think in new ways and move beyond stereotypes.

This reinforces the ideas of Rita Felski's analysis of the use of fantasy as a means to explore ideas of gender.

> Fantasy often involves an experience of identifying across gender; the fictional worlds created by novels and television, poetry and film, allow readers to align themselves with lives and perspectives different from their own.[19]

Fantasy can engage readers to look beyond their preconceived notions of gender. Unfortunately such thinking does have its limits, and the dragon's potential to reject gendered ideas depends upon how anthropomorphised it has been. For instance the dragons, called Pyr, in Deborah Cooke's *Dragonfire*[20] novels are essentially humans who can assume dragon shape. They have all of the characteristics of humans and conform to norms associated with gender that would be expected from their human shapes. In contrast, the dragons of Rachel Hartman's *Seraphina* have a very different view towards gender, generally viewing it as an issue in terms of potential miscegenation with humans while they are in human form, which will be addressed later in the chapter.

Dragons and Women

The issues of gender do not end with the dragon's own gender, but spill over into their dealings with humans. This is where a significant shift in perceptions of the dragon is to be found. The traditional sacrificial maiden in need of rescue from a monstrous dragon has been replaced in contemporary narratives with strong women who form powerful relationships with dragons. Women are increasingly portrayed as having a closer connection to dragons and will generally have an easier time befriending and connecting with dragons than their male counterparts. For instance, Anne McCaffrey's Lessa from *Pern* is able to communicate with all dragons, unlike her male counterparts (a characteristic that not all women share, but only women in the novels are shown to possess). The nature of this connection between dragons and women fluid and ambiguous, but the associations between dragons and women are by no means a symptom of feminist fantasy; these ideas predate that particular genre. Dragons have been linked with women for as long as women have been stolen, or guarded by dragons. Louise Lippencott mentions that there was once the 'classical concept of the dragon as guardian of virtue'.[21] This paradigm allies the dragon with patriarchy, the dragon acting as a living, fire-breathing chastity belt to keep the maiden chaste and therefore marriageable. Such associations are indicative of the dragon's appropriation as a figure of masculinity and established patriarchy, rather than the more current subversive figure and critical voice who rejects human society. LeGuin, who is a key thinker on this subject, reflects on the connection between dragons and women in a very different way. In both her lecture 'Earthsea Revisited' and her essay 'Woman/Wildness' she links dragons and women to the 'Wildness' or 'Wilderness'.

LeGuin notes in her conception of *Earthsea* that 'I think dragons were, above all, wildness. What is *not owned.*'[22] Yet the essay 'Woman/Wildness' presents

another inhabitant of this wildness outside of civilisation: women. Within this essay LeGuin comments that the experiences of men and the shared experiences of genders are typically regarded as constituting civilisation: 'But the experience of women as women, their experience unshared with men, that experience is the wilderness or wildness that is utterly other – that is in fact, to Man, unnatural.'[23] Women and dragons are linked in their experiences as occupants of the edges of society and are considered, when compared to the hegemonic patriarchal establishment, to be unnatural or other.

Previously in this chapter I mentioned how LeGuin depicts dragons as embodiments of freedom, which is also discussed in Chapter 3, in addition to the peril of gazing into the dragon's eye. In *Earthsea* the former priestess turned housewife Tenar finds herself speaking to the dragon Kalessin. Despite only having minimal training and ultimately rejecting the magical arts, she encounters no danger in looking into the dragon's eye. She ponders if perhaps the danger lies in a man gazing into the dragon's eye. LeGuin comments that it is due to Tenar's status as kindred spirit to the dragons that she is unaffected: 'She can look the dragon in the eye – because she chose freedom over power.'[24] Tenar also bonds more easily with the dragon-human child Tehanu, who Kalessin calls daughter, than her partner the former archmage and dragonlord Sparrowhawk. LeGuin thus asserts that in the wildness and otherness of the dragon and the woman there is power, a power which forms a powerful connection between the two.

As mentioned earlier, McCaffrey's Lessa is a figure who likewise has a close connection to the dragons, particularly when compared to her male cohorts. After she becomes a Weyr Woman, or golden dragon-rider, Lessa discovers secrets that

even the dragon-riders in Benden Weyr did not know about dragons, such as their ability to travel through time. She has an intuitive connection to the dragons that is aided by her ability to speak to all of them telepathically, as opposed to just Ramoth, the dragon with whom she has bonded.[25] Lessa's achievements with her dragon are due to an embracing of freedom from the oppressive social structures to which the male riders of the Weyr adhere; both woman and dragon recognise the changes needed due to both occupying societal margins. This rejection of the gendered views held by the other riders allows Lessa to look beyond the idea that 'A queen flies only to mate.'[26] This jettisoning of patriarchal notions results in Lessa and her dragon Ramoth eventually discovering the dragons' ability to time-travel, but in a wider sense once again acts as a fictional challenge to patriarchal hegemony.

Another female figure with a close connection to dragons within contemporary fiction is Daenerys Targaryen of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Despite being from a lineage that flaunted their connection to dragons, Daenerys shows a bond to the creatures unmatched by any member of her family in a long time. In contrast to the Targaryens of the past century who all tried and failed to bring back the dragons,[27] Daenerys not only manages to hatch a baby dragon, she hatches three. Daenerys' connection to her adopted children proves that she is truly the 'Last Dragon',[28] unlike her powerful, charismatic and noble older brother Rhaegar or her vicious, insane brother Viserys. Her name is thus 'Daenerys Stormborn, Mother of Dragons.'[29] Daenerys proves that the traits lauded by her society are not the only way to gain power. Much like the dragons, she rejects the hyper-masculinised social order that exists within *A Song of Ice and Fire*. She defies the notion that power comes to those skilled in the masculine arts of physical combat

and ruthless slaughter, rather linking her power to the empathy and motherhood which society considers to be inferior. Daenerys not only rejects oppressive patriarchy, but seek to overturn it, preferably with kindness and mercy, but with dragonfire if necessary.

Unlike Daenerys, Valka of *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, is a blatant pacifist. Despite her views on conflict, the woman became a dragon-rider long before her son, Hiccup. She develops a bond with the dragons that is so close that she rejects human society entirely. 'I never would have guessed that my mother was some kind of feral dragon-lady.'[30] This isolated middle-aged woman also knows far more about dragons than even her son, who is described by some as the 'Dragon Master'.[31] 'Every dragon has its secrets and I'll show them all to you.'[32] To a certain extent, Valka even empathises more with dragons than humans. She looks after injured and sick dragons, consistently resisting humans who try to fight and capture them. With the aid of a great Alpha dragon she constructs a sanctuary for the various dragons that she rescues. 'I've spent years among them, learning their ways.'[33] Nikianne Moody writes:

> Feminist writers in the genre imagine and explore separatist communities, the exacerbation of women's oppression, the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, women's roles and the deconstruction of patriarchal language.[34]

Valka can be considered to enter such a separatist, feminist community. Through her rejection of human and particularly the macho warlike Viking society, Valka has found a home free from their constraints among the dragons.

Another connection between woman and dragon is the maternal nurturing of a dragon by a woman. Both Valka and Daenerys treat the dragons around them like surrogate children, which is triggered by the loss of a child. Valka was forced to abandon her baby, Hiccup, when she was carried off by a dragon, while Daenerys suffered a miscarriage mere days before the hatching of her dragons. This adoption of dragons also occurs with Tenar in *Earthsea*. Her children are all grown and have left her, so she bonds closely with the dragon in human shape, Tehanu, becoming the child's surrogate mother. The dragons and women are drawn to one another as an attempt to cope with their trauma. Potentially, this is a gendered stereotype of women being the more empathic gender. There is the old world notion of woman as the loving gender who can soothe the animalistic character of the dragon. In this sense, fantasy writers are recycling tropes of the woman as the 'Angel in the House' 'who wields the powers of love'.[35] Regardless of the implications, the adoption of dragons as surrogate children is an established convention. This convention displays an inability on the part of the author to wholly reject gendered ideas (for humans at least). Some ideas such as motherhood are considered to be inherently and inescapably feminine. Dragons may be free to reject gender in all of its forms, for them there is neither masculine nor feminine, just dragon and not-dragon. Humans, for better or worse, are not so liberated.

Dragons and Sexuality

It is a strange combination at first glance; dragons and sexuality. Yet there is clear evidence within literature and even folklore of a correlation between the two. For example within Native American folklore fire is regarded as symbolic of lust or sexuality.[36] The links between dragons and sexuality, despite some incarnations of

dragons as androgynous, are especially apparent in depictions of dragon-riders who possess a psychic link to their dragon companion. While there are folklore roots to this subject, it is a decidedly recent convention, and yet another example of the transformative power of adaptation. Fire and passion have become synonymous with dragons in several texts. One primary example is the highly sexualised comments made by Daenerys within *A Dance with Dragons*, when she takes flight upon the back of her dragon, Drogon, for the first time: 'Daenerys could feel the heat of him between her thighs. Her heart felt as if it were about to burst. *Yes*, she thought, *yes, now now do it, do it, take me, take me, Fly!*'[37] The elation of her initial flight is described using language that can be described as orgasmic. Daenerys's flight is reminiscent of a sexual encounter, and can be considered in the same way as the view that sexual intercourse is a rite of passage into adulthood. The initial flight with the dragon is also analogous to a marriage, as the dragon will only have a single rider at any one time. Daenerys comes from a heritage that in the past rode dragons, so for her to do so for the first time is a moment of equal significance to some culture's views of the loss of virginity.

However, this experience contrasts to her wedding night in the much earlier instalment, *Game of Thrones*, which is more traumatic: 'She stood there helpless and trembling in her wedding silks while he secured the horses, and when he turned to look at her, she began to cry.'[38] In contrast to this moment of gender vulnerability and disempowerment, the flight is an empowering moment. The take-off shows a release and joy, free from constraints. Daenerys is casting off the preconceived notions about how she should be and the will of others as to how she should act; she is instead true to her own self. Daenerys is also linked to her inheritance as a Targaryen, a dragon-rider not beholden to anyone. Drogon and

Daenerys are a stark contrast to the tradition of the dragon guarding a chaste maiden. The contemporary view towards female sexuality and power is evidence of adapting the dragon for a twenty-first century audience, which is accustomed to narratives of female autonomy and power.

The bond between dragon and rider does not end with the language and imagery of fire. The sexual mores of dragon-riders are often affected by their dragons. This concept is explored by Anne McCaffrey in *Dragonflight* and the rest of the *Dragonriders of Pern* series. The dragons, particularly the bronze and gold dragons, instil a greater sense of promiscuity within different characters who are dragon-riders, in this case Lessa and F'lar. When two dragons have a mating flight, their riders in turn also experience the urge to have sex: 'All other sense and feeling were aloft with Ramoth. And she, Ramoth-Lessa, was alive with limitless power, her wings beating effortlessly to the thin heights, elation surging through her frame, elation and – desire!'[39] Due to the nature of this link and the fact that within this setting the dragons may have different sexual partners at different times, the riders are forced to adopt a different set of sexual mores compared to the wider world, with riders able to take on multiple sexual partners without stigma and the children who result from such various unions are raised by the collective society as a whole. The unbridled sexuality and desire instilled within the human riders is indicative of the removal of acceptable boundaries and a resurgence of the id. This could be the influence of the dragon's instinct overwhelming the human as McCaffrey states: 'Dragon instinct was limited to here-and-now, with no ability to control or anticipate. Mankind existed in partnership with them to supply wisdom and order'.[40] This situation can then be interpreted as the dragon going from the submissive personality in the bond

(accepting the human direction and order) to becoming dominant, with the human giving in to their primal desires with no concept of past or future only the immediacy of gratification. Again, there is a greater reflection of contemporary attitudes towards sexuality, where marriage is not a necessary precursor to socially acceptable relationships.

Within other settings, regardless of the society's attitudes towards sex, a different issue emerges. As a dragon and rider are sometimes linked in their minds and emotions, the rider will sometimes need their dragon's approval for mates or sexual partners. This is an issue addressed in Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* where the dragon Saphira explains the nature of their bond to her rider.

> And if you pursue a relationship, with or without my blessing, and become…attached…to someone, my feelings will become engaged as well. You should know that. Therefore – and I warn you only once – be careful who you choose, because it will involve both of us.[41]

The feelings of both figures must be taken into account, as while the sexual relationship would solely be with the rider, the emotional relationship also includes the dragon. 'If you hate someone, I will be influenced likewise.'[42] This requires a greater sense of co-ordination, co-operation and communication as the relationship is divided into three ways (or if the intended mate is also a dragon-rider, four ways).

The Half-Dragon Issue

These ideas of gender and sexuality do not solely relate to humans or human shaped creatures. There is also evidence of inter-species relationships. As mentioned in Chapter 3, dragons are often depicted as possessing the power of

shapeshifting. This shapeshifting ability has occasionally been taken to its logical conclusion by writers and has led to romantic relationships between dragons and humans. While this curious trend would appear to be a relatively recent innovation, human-dragon relationships are not a new concept. In a variation of the Hittite myth about the dragon Illuyanakas, the Storm God's son marries the dragon's daughter, which appears to be the ur-example of such a pairing.[43] These relationships between human and dragon bear some similarity to the shape-shifting lover motif in folklore. It is for this reason that the dragon is, in the majority of stories, female with a male lover. One particular story is the Japanese tale of Toyotama-hime, the daughter of the Dragon-King Ryujin. Toyotama-hime marries a mortal named Hoori and bears his child before returning to the sea.[44] In a similar fashion in the French tale *Melusine* a dragon/fairy marries a mortal knight and bears him many children until he breaks the agreement of their marriage and she flies away.[45]

These unions are almost exclusively considered strange, and due to the difference in species, unnatural. Elaine L. Graham writes that 'Monsters that were hybrids of women and animals, embodied sexual voracity and danger, and their presence in the *polis* signified danger and chaos.'[46] The attraction to the dragons can be seen as an indication of the appeal of the exotic other, so it is both a taboo and yet a titillating fantasy for the human involved. Due to the animalistic appearance of the dragon, the pairing might be considered bestiality by mortals, and in the case of draconic ego, as described in Chapter 2, the dragons may also see inter-breeding in the same light.

These folktales, myths, and legends find a place in modern popular culture, within film, literature, as well as gaming narratives. The beginning of the inter-species relationship in literary narratives has its origin in the second half of the twentieth century, ironically with the table-top game *Dungeons and Dragons* which acts as a precursor that acknowledges the possibility of relationships with dragons. The game and supported materials do not go into great detail on the subject, but they do imply the existence of a significant quantity of liaisons involving dragons as there are creatures known as half-dragons, creatures that are kindred to dragons, as well as people, such as sorcerers who claim to be descended from dragons. Additionally, there exists other species with a 'Dragonblood sub-type' that implies some form of dragon heritage. A recent example from the East occurs with a male dragon and a female human in Hayao Miazaki's folklore-influenced film *Spirited Away*, wherein the human girl Chihiro falls in love with the dragon Haku.[47] In the West however, for some time *Dungeons and Dragons* based texts such as Margeret Weiss and Tracey Hickman's *Dragonlance*, were the predominant materials of dragon-human relationships.

The dawn of the twenty-first century saw inter-species relationships expanded beyond *Dungeons and Dragons*, yet unlike many other dragons which are influenced by predecessors such as Tolkien, LeGuin, and McCaffrey, those that embark upon romance with humans appear to develop independently or else directly from folklore. The human-dragon relationships of recent paranormal romance fiction, such as Deborah Cooke's *Dragonfire* series,[48] do not appear to have any mainstream influences. Within this series the female protagonists each acquire a dragon mate who spends most of his time in human form. The romance is rarely the doomed love from folklore and functions instead with dragons as

idealised men. However, these relationships are not the exclusive domain of the paranormal romance genre, they also occur in mainstream fantasy fiction. One such occurrence is within Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* series, as shown between the shape changing she-dragon Irian and the Kargish Wizard, Azver the Patterner. 'Their relationship is unprecedented in *Earthsea*: a man and a dragon yearning for one another!'[49] Rather than being a commonplace relationship, Irian and Azver tread unknown ground within *Earthsea*. Yet their relationship, while romantic, is not shown to be sexual. The lack of a consummation in their relationship is in part due to its short-lived nature and in part due to Irian passing beyond the boundaries of the world, relishing her freedom as a dragon, while the human Azver remains bound to the world. Though they are in love, their differences as a species can be considered insurmountable. Hence LeGuin does not confront the social reaction to such a controversial and unprecedented pairing.

The consequence of a sexual relationship involving dragons is more specifically addressed in the young adult novel *Seraphina* by Rachel Hartman. Because, in Hartman's fantasy world, dragons are endowed with the human-like capacity of speech, reason and emotion, the issue is never one of bestiality (coupling with an animal other), but is rather analogous to inter-racial relationships. The public reaction to the taboo relationship between human and dragon is often violent: 'Few cases of cohabiting with dragons have ever come all the way to trial; the accused have usually been torn to bits by mobs, been burned alive in their houses or simply disappeared before it came to that.'[50] Such extreme forms of behaviour echo fears of miscegenation and xenophobia. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman support this idea, arguing that:

> discussion of ethnicity is always by implication a discussion of gender and sexuality…Women, as the biological "carriers" of the "race", occupy a primary and complex role in representations of ethnicity…and it is women's exercise of their sexuality which is an often unacknowledged major concern underlying such representations.[51]

The fusion of sexual and racial anxiety has manifested itself throughout history as legislation designed to keep bloodlines 'pure'. Apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany provide perhaps the most toxic example, but in the United States laws against interracial marriage also existed until the Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional in 1967. Within this context fantasy challenges societal assumptions. In lieu of a direct parallel, Hartman instead uses dragons and the offspring of humans and dragons as a means of critiquing the persecution of the racial other.

This attraction to dragons inevitably leads to the production of children. These mixed species offspring are equally likely to be beloved children or considered mistakes by their parents. To the extended community, however, they are, at best, likely to be outcasts due to their unconventional heritage. This attitude is unsurprising as Graham reminds us that 'Creatures who were half-human and half-animal occupied particular significance, for one way of defining what was quintessentially human was to contrast it with that which signified bestiality.'[52] A hybrid human-dragon is simply the incarnation of such a metaphor. Within *Seraphina* the general reaction to such people is overwhelmingly negative. Humans claim 'If soe'er the worms defile your women, producing misshapen, miscegenated abominations, suffer not such ghastly issue to live.'[53] Dragons are equally derisive of such hybrids. 'It's not nearly as hideous as I always pictured

it.'[54] Issues of age and maturity are also raised as a half-dragon will mature at a slower rate to their mortal parent as they live much longer. In both *Dungeons and Dragons 3.5* and Hartman's novel *Seraphina* half-dragons are implied to live much longer than humans, particularly Dame Olka who is over one hundred years old, yet resembles a middle-aged woman. *Dungeons and Dragons* depicts these half-dragons as having a visually different appearance to either parent, being a hybrid of magical reptile and humanoid. This monstrous visage is not always the case as other literary depictions will also show this hybrid off-spring as having a human appearance but magical abilities. In even more cases, the child born of the union will have a human appearance for the early stages of their life, but will eventually gain the ability to change form and assume their true appearance as a dragon.

In *Seraphina*, these children also have a predominantly human appearance, but with some visual marker of their reptilian parent that ranges in severity. 'She had a tail, a stubby one, shingled over entirely with silver scales. Scales just like mine.'[55] Other examples include: 'Just scales on my arm and at my waist.'[56] Irrespective of their appearance, half-dragons are never portrayed as anything other than outsiders, which again brings to the fore human fears of racial difference and miscegenation. The physical markers cause society to reject them because of their perceived difference. Bennett and Royle state: 'Racism is, before anything else, the delusion of essentialism.'[57] Half-dragons are a challenge to the perception that humans and dragons can never integrate, revealing that they are not as different as either would hope. Hence they are a threat to any who believe in racial essentialism. Meanwhile, Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer write that

> stigma and normalcy produce each other: stigmatization places a group outside the bounds of what is considered ordinary, acceptable, and expected by others; members of stigmatized groups are deprived of being normal.[58]

These ideas of racism and stigmatisation are both apparent in *Seraphina* with the humans' religious condemnation of half-dragons. This relationship often requires a need to instil a sense of essentialism in its congregation and stigmatise against transgressors or those perceived as outsiders.

The reasons for this unusual occurrence are difficult to answer; however, in some cases it could be termed an attraction to the exotic other. Because dragons are so mysterious and powerful we must thus desire them, and because they can assume a compatible shape, we must desire them sexually. It takes Tolkien's words: 'I desire dragons'[59] and puts it into an entirely different context. There are obvious links to the trope of the desirable Alpha Male. In paranormal romance, whose target audience is mostly women, the male dragon is typically a powerful dark and troubled figure, the new Heathcliff. I mentioned in Chapter 2 about the dragon possessing characteristics of the Gothic villain, but he is equally a Byronic hero. The dragon is a mysterious, powerful, almost dominant figure who exists as a perpetual outsider. Additionally he is a counterpoint to the overtly sexualised vampire. The dragon does not need to seduce, instead it is definitively troubled, rejects societal norms and (an attractive quality to some) often very rich.

Issues of dragons and gender, along with human-dragon relationships, are a significantly under examined area within dragon-lore. This field of dragon-lore is perhaps the most effective at examining a present day human issue through the

lens of fantasy. The dragons themselves are not literal metaphors, but can act as portals to explore ideas such as gender discrimination, xenophobia, and racism. Within these spheres of discussion, the dragon can serve as either perpetrator or champion in these causes, further revealing that the dragon is not simply good or bad, male or female, but occupies the ambiguous space of applicability; it is whatever it needs to be. The way in which the dragon is utilised is dependent upon the authors. On occasion this will lead to a reinforcement of gender stereotypes, but overall the connection between women, dragons, and sexuality is subversive and destabilising. It overturns established ideas in society, as in many modern examples, such as the work of LeGuin, Martin, and McCaffrey, dragons represent absolute freedom. This is perhaps the zenith of contemporary adaptation, with authors and directors not just recycling but genuinely transforming traditional tropes and narrative staples.

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Conclusion

The Modern Dragon is a creature of many shapes and forms, with abilities that might be considered strange and uncanny. It is an alien force that we cannot fully understand, with unfathomable goals and weird moral standards. Yet the dragon is also a lens to aptly critique human behaviour, pointing out our strengths as well as our flaws. The dragon is an ancient creature with a long mythological and literary pedigree, but it persists in modern writings and continues to be relevant as it is adapted, evolving to suit new time periods and audiences. As it has accumulated further characteristics, the dragon has cemented its status as humanity's fictional nemesis, both mirroring and inverting characteristics that we see within ourselves.

Many of the ideas concerning the Modern Dragon are not themselves new, but are rather appropriated in new ways. The dragon has always had a variety of body types, as evident from the different forms that have emerged over the centuries. By approximately the fifteenth century, however, these body types became standardised and a more static version of the dragon was established, likely due to the popularity of bestiaries and dragon-based artwork. This typified dragon even became fixed into cinema, especially with the predominance of the wyvern in that medium. Recent films, however, such as *How to Train Your Dragon*, have begun defying the brief static period of dragon imagery by creating innovative and interesting variations. Adaptation theorists such as Linda Hutcheon and Linda Costanzo Cahir provide a useful lens for understanding these 'radical departures'[1] from tradition. This shows a shift in perception, with dragons conforming to codified shapes while also being distinct through drawing a variety of natural inspirations that look beyond the merely reptilian. Dragons can now possess vivid hues of violets, pinks, and yellows in addition to the more conventional blues,

greens, reds, and gold. Some dragons, such as Disney *Mulan*'s Mushu, can be quite diminutive in size, while in the film *How to Train Your Dragon* creatures like the Deadly Nadder can have an avian appearance; demonstrating how versatile and diverse the dragon's form has become in modern adaptations.

Given all of the personality quirks of the dragon, and its place in the wider world, it is necessary to view the creature as simultaneously human and animal, a task made easier due to the work of human-animal studies scholars such as Philip Armstrong. The dragon is both an intellectual peer to humanity and a physically different entity. Unlike other creatures that are comparable to humans, but monstrous, the dragon does not have any ape-like physical traits or even a humanoid body type. It defies preconceived notions about intelligence and baffles monster theorists, such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who seek to discuss the difference of the monster, yet neglect the extreme ends of what is monstrous and non-human. Authors such as Rachel Hartman, Christopher Paolini, and Ursula K. LeGuin seek to address this difference and look at the dragon as an intelligence that is understandable and yet different to humans, particularly by placing humans and dragons in situations where dialogue is possible. Concepts of the Other, building on the work of Edward Said, are vital in tracking the points of difference and connection between human and dragon. This understanding is particularly necessary as Cressida Cowell and J. R. R. Tolkien posit that the dragon's voice and intelligence is equally formidable to its physical attributes; hence the battle with the dragon is not just one of swords and fangs, but also of minds. This is (barring the significant exception of the *Volsungsaga*'s dragon Fafnir) a departure from the dragon's history and tradition in the West, where dragons have typically been voiceless, or if in possession of a voice not inclined to trade perspectives.

The magical nature of dragons is potentially what distances them the most from humans, as for a dragon to be un-magical is the exception rather than the norm. It is ironic that what makes a dragon so different is also what enables them to relate to humanity the most. Abilities such as telepathy and shape-changing allow some dragons to take the form of a human or enter the mind of a person. With the growing emphasis on the dragon's mind, it is unsurprising that many authors gift dragons with mental powers such as telepathy, mind reading, and the evil eye. Additionally, dragons are depicted as having a close relationship to magic, expanding further on the traditions that ally dragons with magic or with Eastern tradition that ties them to the mystical and spiritual. The discussion of such abilities requires an understanding of magic which is aided by the works of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, particularly with regards to magic as a force that relies on tradition and affects things outside of human experience. In the case of authors such as George R.R. Martin and Christopher Paolini, however, the dragons are the source of magical power. Their connection to magic will inevitably cause change all around them, even allowing humans the chance to glimpse and utilise this mysterious power of magic, which for a dragon is as intrinsic and necessary as water is for humans. Through their embodiment of magic dragons represent the unpredictable forces of the world, and hence are agents of change.

The ancient interactions between humans and dragons, our conflicts and friendships, are perhaps the most fascinating part of my research in this thesis. I was aware of the significant heritage of dragon-slaying narratives, but was surprised to note that even in contemporary writings, such as *The Hobbit* or, more

recently, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, authors still adhere to old tradition and form. The research of folklorist Jacqueline Simpson and semiologist Jonathan D. Evans' regarding the tropes and narrative patterns of dragon-slaying still applies in the twenty-first century. As a counterpart to dragon-slaying, the concept of dragon-riding left me feeling fascinated by how old it truly is in its ancient Chinese origins. It also provided further evidence of what Fanfan Chen terms 'the globalisation of dragons'[2] within literature and the fusion of Eastern and Western ideas. The nature of dragon-riding is one of interspecies co-operation and understanding. Despite the gains made by the recent field of human-animal studies in revising how dragons are considered as animals, the idea that humans and dragons can understand one another and work together is far older than contemporary fiction would suggest. This discovery further drove me to remedy the lack of scholarship regarding this significant subject. Authors such as Anne McCaffrey, Christopher Paolini, and Cressida Cowell contribute to the growing number of depictions favouring interspecies friendship. This surge in interest is a natural progression of changing views towards animals, as proposed by Sandra Unerman. Just as animals cannot embody human morality, neither can dragons.

This lack of scholarship on particular issues is also apparent in my fifth chapter, particularly relating to gender and miscegenation. The dragon's ambiguous gender was a research surprise, as it was not something that I had initially considered. This idea of a creature that can blatantly ignore what Judith Butler terms 'the presumption of a binary gender system',[3] augments the dragon's ability to serve as a critical voice of difference within fantasy fiction. In a similar manner, I was not aware of how deeply ingrained the concept of the human-dragon relationships and their usually tragic ends were, or their roots in folklore. In turn human-dragon

relationships are also applicable as social and racial commentary in detailing what these relationships create and how society reacts to this arguable taboo.

Despite my intentions to observe the dragon outside of an allegorical context, it is impossible to escape the creature's use in metaphor. As allegory the versatility and captivating nature of the dragon is considerably reduced to what Tolkien referred to as 'draconitas'.[4] This was heavily influenced by his distaste for allegory, but the dragon remains most effective as a figure of applicability. As Tolkien states: 'I think that many confuse "applicability" with "allegory"; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.'[5] The dragon has become one of the most applicable symbols, with a universality that is difficult to surpass. We see in the dragon reflections of humanity; without the dragon embodying specific characteristics, it can push ideas such as race, gender, difference, animals, and morality into the foreground, to be confronted and battled.

The primary authors within this thesis are all indicative of the multiple ways the dragon is conceived and adapted in contemporary writing. Of these, Tolkien is the most significant, as he is the primary link to Western cultural depictions of dragons and exists as a touchstone for subsequent writers. While writers draw from Tolkien, he draws from tradition. In the same way that the tree of stories grows, Tolkien takes from the roots and seeds, while other writers adapt from his work by making cuttings. No text exemplifies this more than *Dungeons and Dragons*. While there are some innovations in terms of depictions of dragons — such as magic, shape changing, and the half-dragon — the eponymous creatures

of this game are predominantly stereotypical hoarders who do not interact with humans except as foes.

Ursula K. LeGuin is also a pivotal figure, giving new relevance to the dragon by her alertness to issues of gender. Terry Pratchett represents an important contemporary shift in perspective, portraying the dragon as animal rather than monster, a characteristic also adopted by J. K. Rowling and George R.R. Martin. Yet, at the same time, Martin shows the military applications of the dragon, its status and value as a superweapon, reiterating, in the Tolkien tradition, the destructive power of the creature.

Christopher Paolini — whose *Inheritance Cycle* was begun and completed during the writing of *A Storm of Swords* and *A Feast for Crows* from Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* —takes a differing opinion towards dragons, showing them as Other, but also representing them as a species with whom human co-operation is possible. They are not weapons, but partners, drawing upon the dragon-riding phenomenon introduced to Western writing by Anne McCaffrey. Cressida Cowell's novel *How to Train Your Dragon* and its film adaptation show a similar vein of co-operation, but at the same time do not draw directly from the Tolkienian style fantasy that heavily influenced previous depictions. Cowell's dragons are diverse and in some cases (particularly the Red Death) draw once again upon traditional tropes.

In the work of the most recent author to be discussed, Rachel Hartman, a truly modern dragon has emerged. Her dragons are distinct in their difference, critical of humanity yet with their own flaws. They offer an insight into the concept of

interspecies co-operation and even romance, along with all of the controversies that ensue. Within this text there has been a natural progression to what I would term ‘the movement’ towards a modern dragon. The dragons in many contemporary works are comparable to and contrastable with humanity, but Hartman has made them fully applicable in their societal differences to humans.

There is still scope for further research into the dragon and its role in contemporary fiction. I still have many questions that merit exploration and more definitive answers. This is particularly apparent with ideas such as the dragon’s pearl, which I now consider to be the reason why dragons are magical. The exact time in which this idea emerged remains elusive and is a question whose answer remains to be uncovered. The link between dragons and music is another idea that could be a topic in its own right, where my lack of knowledge regarding music is a barrier to properly answering this question. This motif is a constant within story-telling, so should be explored further. But these, and other conundrums — such as the link between dragons and divinity, as well as a more in depth study of why dragons are sexually and gender ambiguous — must await a later date for answers.

Within this thesis I have reflected on the Modern Dragon and how it is received in the twenty-first century. For contemporary scholarship to keep up with the changing nature of the dragon, it too must broaden and adapt to the current cultural trends. This process has already begun with Unerman’s association between dragons and contemporary views of animals, as well as Fanfan Chen’s discussion of globalised dragons. Even with the unanswered questions touched on above, I can state definitively that our fascination with dragons will endure, as

Jerome Jeffrey Cohen says: 'We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair.'[6] As long as these feelings endure, so will the dragon.

The field of dragon-lore is far from becoming tired and stale. The dragon keeps reinventing itself for audiences; it remains a challenge to humanity whether mental, physical, or metaphorical. What I have uncovered within this thesis serves to reinforce Linda Hutcheon's comment that '[Dragons] remain creatures of the outer limits and the inner life of the mind. Every century has its dragons.'[7] The dragon is an ever-evolving figure and the more globalised the world becomes the more the dragon will grow and change, with yet more questions and subjects emerging. But now this thesis' journey must reach its conclusion. 'So comes snow after fire, and even dragons have their endings.'[8]

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[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.6.
[4] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (London: Oxford University, 1936), p. 17.
[5] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Foreword to the Second Edition', *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins*Publishing*, 2002), [first published in one volume (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968)] xv-xviii, p. xvii.
[6] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', *Monster Theory*, ed., Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), p.17.
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